



# PICTURES IN THE TATE GALLERY





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PICTURES IN  
THE TATE GALLERY





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**ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI.**  
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.



# PICTURES IN THE TATE GALLERY

BY

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"THE WEAVER'S SHUTTLE," ETC.

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

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To

*My Sister and Brother*

E. & T. WILSON

THIS BOOK

*Is affectionately and gratefully inscribed*





# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY: THE FORMATION OF THE COLLECTION AND THE BUILDING OF THE GALLERY . . . . .	1
II. THE GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS OF THE EARLY VICTORIAN ERA . . . . .	13
III. THE EARLY LANDSCAPE PAINTERS . . . . .	27
IV. LANDSCAPE PAINTERS: GEORGE VICAT COLE (1833-1893); JOHN MACWHIRTER (BORN 1839) . . . . .	39
V. THE FORERUNNERS OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITE REVIVAL: WILLIAM DYCE (1806-1864); J. F. LEWIS (1805-1876); FORD MADDOX BROWN (1821-1893) . . . . .	49
VI. THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: GABRIEL CHARLES DANTE ROSSETTI (1828-1882) . . . . .	63
VII. THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: SIR JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS (1829-1896) . . . . .	77
VIII. THE PRE-RAPHAELITE DISCIPLES . . . . .	91
IX. IMAGINATIVE ART: GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS (1817-1904) . . . . .	99
X. CLASSIC ART: ALBERT MOORE (1841-1893), ALFRED STEVENS (1817-1875) . . . . .	115
XI. CLASSICAL ART: FREDERIC LORD LEIGHTON (1830-1896); SIR LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA (BORN 1836); SIR EDWARD J. POYNTER (BORN 1836) . . . . .	127

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XII. POETIC ART: FREDERICK WALKER (1840-1875); GEORGE HEMING MASON (1818-1873); JOHN WILLIAM NORTH (BORN 1842) . . . . .	141
XIII. A PAINTER OF PURE LANDSCAPE: CECIL GORDON LAWSON (1851-1882). . . . .	157
XIV. THE PAINTERS OF THE SEA: HENRY MOORE (1831- 1895); JOHN BRETT (1831-1902); JAMES CLARKE HOOK (BORN 1819); C. NAPIER HEMY (BORN 1841); COLIN HUNTER (BORN 1841). . . . .	165
XV. TWO PAINTERS OF ANIMALS: BRITON RIVIERE (BORN 1840); H. W. B. DAVIS (BORN 1833) . . . .	173
XVI. MODERN GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS . . .	183
XVII. THE MODERN SCHOOL OF <i>PLEIN AIR</i> PAINTERS .	193

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>By D. G. ROSSETTI</i>	
THE POOL OF LONDON . . . . .	<i>To face page 44</i>
<i>By G. VICAT COLE, R.A.</i>	
JUNE IN THE AUSTRIAN TYROL . . . . .	„ 46
<i>By J. MACWHIRTER, R.A.</i>	
CHRIST WASHING ST. PETER'S FEET . . . . .	„ 60
<i>By FORD MADDOX BROWN</i>	
ROSA TRIPLEX . . . . .	„ 74
<i>By D. G. ROSSETTI</i>	
OPHELIA . . . . .	„ 84
<i>By Sir J. E. MILLAIS, P.R.A.</i>	
THE VALE OF REST . . . . .	„ 86
<i>By Sir J. E. MILLAIS, P.R.A.</i>	
LOVE AND LIFE . . . . .	„ 108
<i>By G. F. WATTS, R.A.</i>	
BLOSSOMS . . . . .	„ 120
<i>By ALBERT MOORE</i>	
THE BATH OF PSYCHE . . . . .	„ 136
<i>By LORD LEIGHTON, P.R.A.</i>	
THE VAGRANTS . . . . .	„ 144
<i>By FREDERIC WALKER, A.R.A.</i>	



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE HARBOUR OF REFUGE . . . . .	<i>To face page</i> 148
<i>By</i> FREDERIC WALKER, A.R.A.	
WIND ON THE WOLD . . . . .	„ 150
<i>By</i> G. H. MASON, A.R.A.	
THE CAST SHOE . . . . .	„ 152
<i>By</i> G. H. MASON, A.R.A.	
THE AUGUST MOON . . . . .	„ 162
<i>By</i> CECIL G. LAWSON	
CATSPAWS OFF THE LAND . . . . .	„ 170
<i>By</i> HENRY MOORE, R.A.	
THE MIRACLE OF THE GADARENE SWINE . . . . .	„ 178
<i>By</i> BRITON RIVIERE, R.A.	
RETURNING TO THE FOLD . . . . .	„ 180
<i>By</i> H. W. B. DAVIS, R.A.	
THE VIGIL . . . . .	„ 190
<i>By</i> JOHN PETTIE, R.A.	
AUGUST BLUE . . . . .	„ 200
<i>By</i> HENRY S. TUKE, A.R.A.	

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY: THE FORMATION OF THE COLLECTION AND THE BUILDING OF THE GALLERY





# PICTURES IN THE TATE GALLERY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY: THE FORMATION OF THE COLLECTION AND THE BUILDING OF THE GALLERY



It is probably with a sense of surprise that many visitors to the Tate Gallery read upon the covers of the official catalogue, "Pictures and Sculpture in the National Gallery of British Art." We remember dimly that this was the original designation of Sir Henry Tate's gift to the nation. But the academic name only lingers officially; from the very first it was discarded by the populace. Upon the day the Gallery was opened they coupled the building with the name of its founder, and to the majority of people it still remains the Tate Gallery. And in this instance the popular verdict was right. The Tate Gallery is a better name for the collection at Millbank than the National Gallery of British Art, Indeed, while reviewing the history of the building and its

## PICTURES IN

pictures, one fact has remained dominant in my mind. We owe this record of British art in the main to individual effort. The Tate Gallery is a series of munificent gifts rather than a national collection.

In the dawning years of the nineteenth century art was not regarded as a forcible factor in the public weal. It was a period of artistic uniformity marked by a singular want of variety of outlook. Many pictures were painted, but there was little distinctive British art, if we understand the phrase in its full significance. Groups of historical and genre painters clung to traditional ideals; the colour of their pictures was ruined by the use of bitumen; their surfaces were stippled to one glossy regularity of texture, while their subjects were chosen with a finer regard for sentiment than for truth. The supreme object of the approved painter was to fulfil conditions that had become classic. Turner and Constable, the interpreters of landscape, alone handled their paint in such a way that they depicted Nature in a living and truthful guise.

This morient growth of benumbing tradition was not confined to art alone. It was a vibration from widespread thought. Through every section of life we find the same corroding desire to cling to established customs. It is true that as early as 1836 a special report of the House of Commons was issued, advising that some portion of the National Gallery should be set apart for the encouragement and perpetuation of British Art. In the same record we find a recommendation that pictures by living painters should be purchased, "after they had stood the test of time and criticism."

## THE TATE GALLERY

Little practical outgrowth appears to have followed this suggestion. From time to time a cry was raised in the press, urging the necessity for a national collection consecrated to British Art. But the primal action was taken in 1842, when Sir Francis Chantrey, the sculptor, bequeathed the reversion of his fortune in trust to the President and Council of the Royal Academy, "for the purchase of WORKS OF FINE ART OF THE HIGHEST MERIT IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE that can be obtained, either already executed or which may hereafter be executed by artists of any nation, provided such artists shall have actually resided in Great Britain during the executing and completing of such works."

These are the terms of Sir Francis Chantrey's will. The words were written while he dreamed of a National Collection which would worthily represent British Art.

It is a point of interest to note that all prices paid were commanded to be liberal, while the solitary consideration that was to influence the selection of a work of art was ITS INTRINSIC MERIT.

"It is my wish and intention that the works of Art so purchased shall be collected for the purpose of forming and establishing a PUBLIC NATIONAL COLLECTION OF BRITISH FINE ART IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE."

With delightful optimism the will continues, "in the confident expectation that, whenever the collection shall become or be considered of sufficient importance, the Government or the Country will provide a suitable and proper building or accommodation for their preservation and exhibition as the property of the nation."

## PICTURES IN

The Tate Gallery is the fulfilment of this hope.

It was not until the death of Lady Chantrey, in 1876, that the bequest came into effect. Next year seven pictures and one piece of sculpture were purchased by the Royal Academy Trustees for an amount somewhat over £5000. Year by year fresh works were acquired, but a National Gallery of British Art was still a dream. The Chantrey pictures and statues were stowed in South Kensington Museum; the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square was already overcrowded, and as the Chantrey gifts continued to multiply, certain pictures were sent on loan to the provinces, principally for the purpose of getting rid of them.

In 1885 this was the somewhat dreary result of Sir Francis Chantrey's generosity. In this year public interest was redirected to the necessity for promoting British Art. A paper was read by Mr. James Orrock before the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, with the result that a petition for an annual parliamentary grant of £5000 for the advancement of national painting was suggested. Much was written upon the subject, but the outcome appears to have been little more than an increased interest centred in the question. Once more there were many suggestions and much talking, while practical accomplishment was again left to a private individual.

In the summer of 1890 Sir Henry, then Mr. Tate, offered the Government "not fewer than fifty-seven of his pictures to form the nucleus of a British collection," with the obligation that his gift should remain intact, and



## THE TATE GALLERY

should not be housed either at the National Gallery or South Kensington Museum.

The necessity for a separate Gallery devoted to British Art now became imperative, but it appears doubtful if the question would ever have passed the initial stage of suggestive argument, if Sir Henry Tate had not offered—in the first instance anonymously—a sum of £80,000 to erect a building, if the Government would provide a suitable site. Even then discussion was not ended. A locality acceptable to both sides was for long sought in vain, and during many months the inglorious warfare continued.

The record of this counterplay of generosity and mismanagement is not inspiring. At one time it appeared probable that Sir Henry's liberal proposal would be swamped in the sea of wrangling. However, the situation was redeemed by a change of Government. Sir William Harcourt proposed to meet Mr. Tate, and in half-an-hour they decided the question. Millbank Prison had recently been pulled down, and this site, which had every advantage except accessibility, was offered and accepted. It was further agreed that, upon the completion of the building, the management should be placed in the care of the Trustees of the National Gallery. This was an arrangement of considerable advantage; it linked the new institution with the older Gallery, and ensured the removal of the more modern British pictures to enrich the Millbank collection.

From this time no delay impeded the building. The foundations were laid in September 1893, and four years later, on 21st July 1897, the Gallery was opened, and

# PICTURES IN

formally handed over to the Government by King Edward VII., at that time Prince of Wales.

THIS GALLERY

AND SIXTY-FIVE PICTURES

WERE PRESENTED TO THE NATION

BY

HENRY TATE

FOR THE

ENCOURAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

OF BRITISH ART

AND AS A THANK-OFFERING FOR

A PROSPEROUS BUSINESS CAREER OF

SIXTY YEARS

This simple record of a great gift is inscribed upon the base of a column in the Sculpture Gallery, immediately in front of the entrance.

Originally the Gallery was of little more than half its present size. The rooms were already filled upon the opening day, and Sir Henry Tate at once decided to use part of the remaining land, which had been granted to him by the Government, to extend the building.

We cannot refrain from admiration when we remember this unasked and continued donation. The initial outlay had already amounted to £105,000, much above the amount first promised. But Sir Henry's interest in his gift was very deep, and his generosity was unstinted. He was a constant visitor at the Gallery until his death, in 1900,

## THE TATE GALLERY

and he always took a practical and personal concern in its government. His loss is still deeply felt by all connected with the Tate Gallery.

Of the building itself it is necessary to say very little. It was designed by Mr. Sidney R. J. Smith, F.R.I.B.A., who eloquently describes the architecture as being "in a free classic style, with a Greek feeling in the mouldings and ornaments."

It is not possible to praise the motive which inspired this mixed style of decoration. But few of us have sufficient knowledge to perceive these defects. The rooms are spacious and well-lighted, and this, after all, is the question of central importance in a picture gallery.

I have dwelt at some length upon the record of the troubles and anxieties which attended the birth of our National Gallery of British Art. To me they explain much of the composite character of the collection. It is well to remember the varied sources from which the pictures have been gathered. Again I would say, that this aggregation of art is the result of individual taste rather than of national selection. It is possible some advantage may be gained from this variety, but it certainly lessens the representative value of the work.

With Mr. Tate's gift this was inevitable. The pictures were chosen from his collection at Streatham by the Trustees of the Royal Academy. Only five of the offered pictures were rejected; sixty-one canvases were brought to the Tate Gallery, and to this number five more were afterwards added. It is probable many of us may wish that the appreciation of the selectors had been less catholic. Still

## PICTURES IN

many of the pictures are excellent. The majority are by modern painters, though a strong work by old Crome, two landscapes by Linnell, Sir E. Landseer's "Uncle Tom and his Wife for Sale," and a portrait by Hoppner are noteworthy exceptions. Among the modern painters we have the exquisite "Wind on the Wold," by G. H. Mason, and many works by Sir John Millais. No other painter is equally well represented, unless possibly Mr. Orchardson and Mr. Briton Riviere, and to the Tate gift we owe the two fine pre-Raphaelite pictures "Ophelia" and "The Vale of Rest."

Upon the opening of the Gallery the works acquired under the terms of the Chantrey trust were brought from South Kensington Museum. These pictures now fill the four corridors upon the right of the Sculpture Hall; prior to the extension of the building they were all crowded into the first long Gallery. At that date seventy-two pictures and twelve pieces of sculpture had been bought at a total expenditure of £51,712.

It is not easy to speak of these pictures without a certain sense of disappointment when we remember the terms of the bequest. We cannot fail to think of the desire of Sir Francis Chantrey, as he pictured a British Gallery of painting and sculpture that would contain "the best works of art that could be obtained." However, it is not our province to criticise the manner in which these hopes have been fulfilled. We have to speak of the pictures in the Gallery, and not of those we might wish to see. The names of unrepresented masters must necessarily rise in our minds as we linger among the pictures. And



## THE TATE GALLERY

to some of us the collection must remain incomplete until such men as Whistler, Holman Hunt, Brangwyn, and Furse, as well as several members of the Glasgow school are here acknowledged among the painters of their age.

Many regretted omissions have been repaired by individual gifts. Rossetti's "Beata Beatrix" and "Rosa Triplex," "Christ Washing the Feet of Peter" by Ford Madox Brown, the works of Alfred Stevens, "St. John Leading the Virgin from the Tomb" by William Dyce, Frederick Walker's "Harbour of Refuge," Cecil Lawson's "August Moon," "Femmes en Prière" by Alphonse Legros, "King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid" by Sir Edward Burne Jones, have all been presented privately to the nation. Bereft, indeed, would be the collection of British Art were these works removed. Thus, even again, we are driven back to the thought that the Tate Gallery is the result of personal munificence.

We have yet to record the gift of Mr. G. F. Watts. Seventeen of his works he dedicated to the nation. These were placed in the Gallery before the opening ceremony, and to this initial gift seven more works have since been added. The pictures hang alone in a long well-lighted room. We are surrounded with the work of one creator. The canvases are not all of equal beauty nor have they all the same technical merit. But here it is possible to enter into the spirit of the painter, and to understand something of the fulness of his art.

Most of the remaining pictures were transferred to Millbank from the National Gallery. It was a question of

## THE TATE GALLERY

some difficulty to decide which pictures should be retained at Trafalgar Square, and which should be sent to the new British collection. The year 1790 was taken as the dividing line, and although there are several notable exceptions, roughly speaking, it may be said that the chief British pictures painted during the last hundred years were removed to the Tate Gallery.

These, then, are the sources from which the pictures have been gathered.

“What ought a National Collection to be?” This question was asked by William Dyce, in a letter he addressed to H.R.H. Prince Albert, on the Formation and Management of the National Gallery:—

“A National Collection can aim at no lower object than to exhibit the whole development of the art of painting; the examples of which it consists must therefore range over its whole history—extensive, illustrative, with the greatest possible fulness and variety,—at once extensive and complete.”

This answer embodies the dream of Sir Francis Chantrey. It is still the ideal of those who recognise the breadth and the power of British Art.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS OF THE EARLY VICTORIAN ERA





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### THE GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS OF THE EARLY VICTORIAN ERA



THE early Victorian era was a time of picture making rather than of picture painting. Until the year 1850, which may stand as a somewhat arbitrary boundary line between the old and the new ideals, the main object of the ordinary painter was to produce a pleasing picture—to suggest a story, to teach a lesson, to raise a laugh, gently to excite emotion; these were his ambitions, and to these he often sacrificed his truth of vision. “In thirty years English art will have ceased to exist,” wrote Constable in 1821, as he realised the weakness that had arisen from an unintelligent following of tradition; and he might have added, “Killed by the vice of anecdote.”

An artistic expression that conformed with the accepted standard, and was simple to understand, appealed to a wider audience. In this way the first purpose of the anecdotal painters became the interest of their subject, until at last the theme of their pictures grew to be of more moment than how they achieved their work. They set out to paint with this purpose of a pleasing subject steadfast in their minds. They pondered over books to find stories to paint;

## PICTURES IN

they regarded every incident with the same intention ; all the many suggestive figures of everyday life they immediately arranged into pictures, and the result of this false ideal was a slow but inevitable weakening of artistic strength. The palette of these painters was restricted to a few cold and heavy tints. They habitually used bitumen to give lustre to their canvases, thereby destroying the permanent beauty of their paint ; they disregarded chiaroscuro and knew little of the effect of light upon colour. As a rule their manner of handling was heavy and niggling ; they delighted in brown shadows, and many of their pictures look as if they were painted with treacle. The scenes chosen were invariably pleasing, but the attitudes were often commonplace with memories of the lay figure. Three traits, however, redeem their work from paltriness : its sincerity, its humour, and its intensity—and these characteristics may be traced, in lesser or fuller degree, in all their pictures.

Perhaps no one illustrates these limitations and these distinctive merits more convincingly than Sir David Wilkie (1785–1841), the greatest of the Victorian genre painters. Wilkie diligently studied Ostade and other Dutch masters, and this influence was powerful in moulding his early work. The story of his receiving Hogarth's maulstick is well known, and the incident is not without significance. To some extent Wilkie was the successor of Hogarth, and he continued the tradition that it was the artist's duty to use his technical power to narrate rather than to depict. He spoke in a milder language than the strong early master, nor was he gifted with the same rare technical ability. He was less tragic, and had more humour, and was not

## THE TATE GALLERY

burdened with the same intense desire to teach. One painter felt the bitterness of life, while the other realised its quaint sweetness, but both were alike in making the subject the primary interest of their pictures.

The year 1825 marks a boundary in Wilkie's life. The pictures painted before that time are scenes of unaffected domestic genre; they breathe a jovial light-heartedness, which causes us to forgive the paucity of their imagination. Here we discover the true Wilkie, as nature meant him to be, uncomplex, very English, a little commonplace, but absolutely sincere.

In the study of "Blind Man's Buff" and in "The News-mongers," we see the painter at his best, in no way great, but simple, sincere, and merry. The figures in the latter picture have a charming grace. It is an old-fashioned group. A girl sits upon a stile, a boy leans over her shoulder, while together they read the week's news. The figures grouped around them are all listening to the reader, the attitudes are natural, each face is eagerly happy, for there is nothing tragic in the news-sheet Wilkie pictures.

Contrast this early work with "The First Ear-ring" or the "Preaching of John Knox," one painted in 1835 and the other in 1832. The change in Wilkie's style cannot be mistaken. His simple English matter-of-factness is gone, his handling is broader and freer, his colour is deeper; there is more thought, more meaning in these pictures, but we miss the single-mindedness which charmed us in the earlier work.

In 1825 Wilkie journeyed to the Continent to regain his health. For three years he travelled, and meanwhile

## PICTURES IN

the paintings of the old masters burst upon him as a revelation. He admired the style of Rembrandt and Correggio, while in Spain he was deeply influenced by the living reality of Velazquez.

For many months Wilkie stayed in the Peninsula, while he made a deep study of Spanish art. He went to Seville and saw the melting tones of Murillo, and it is interesting to learn that he was the first critic to note the faults in the Sevillian favourite's over-lauded picture of "Moses Striking the Rock," in the Caridad of Seville.

Wilkie returned to England with his simple art creed shattered. Somewhat later he went to Eugène Delacroix to ask his judgment upon a series of Spanish sketches. And the French painter gives this record of the interview: "He seemed to me entirely unsettled by the paintings he had seen. I wondered that a man with so true a genius could be thus influenced by works so different from his own."

This upheaval of the artistic foundations of a very simple and sincere painter is touched with pathos. Very earnestly Wilkie strove for "the grand manner" he envied. He was always a careful worker, and we learn that somewhere about this time he devoted six weeks to painting a tablecloth. But an artist can only give to others the natural outgrowth of his own nature, and Wilkie was not constituted to express this new ideal.

From this time he ceased to paint his scenes of village life, instead he worked from his Spanish sketches, or composed striking historic scenes. It must not be thought that these pictures are without merit. "The First Ear-ring"



## THE TATE GALLERY

has a certain quaint grace which almost causes us to forget its unreality. The vigour of many of the figures in the scene of John Knox is admirable; they are portraits, excellently drawn, and well coloured. But the genius of painting an historical scene is to make it live again, and with all its power, all its workmanship, the picture remains a failure—a careful piece of painting, interesting, but without reality. Wilkie possessed none of the qualities necessary for the creation of great art. He was the child of his period, sharing its simplicity and its rigid limitations.

In examining Wilkie's two manners we have exhausted the motives which impelled the greater number of his contemporaries. A sentimental love of trivial incident, intermingled with a yearning for the grandeur of a classic manner; these were the main artistic dynamics in the first years of the last century. Thomas Webster (1800–1886), William Mulready (1786–1863), William Collins (1788–1847), Thomas Good (1789–1872) and many others continued to paint village scenes; very pretty, a little sentimental, and perfectly easy to understand. They speak a language untouched with personality; "The Truant," "A Dame's School," "The Last In," "The Newspaper," "No News," "The Prawn Catchers"—how we loved these pictures in our childhood! The A B C illustrations wherein we learnt our first stumbling spellings in art! It may be we have travelled far from them; yet we look back to these pictures with thoughts of affectionate memory.

Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–1873) claims a place among the group of anecdotal painters. No other artist reveals more forcibly the strong tendencies of British painting.



## PICTURES IN

Landseer tells his picture-stories about animals instead of about people. This is the only difference. As a rule his dogs, his stags, and his horses were not painted for their own sake alone, but for some picturesque motive they were intended to illustrate. Undoubtedly he had a special instinct for delineating animal nature. Still the majority of his animals are humanised, and he was not free from the bane of the anecdotal ideal. Walk around the corridors of the Tate Gallery and look at Landseer's pictures, or go to the National Gallery where the majority of his work is gathered, you will notice that in many instances his animals are brushed, washed, and arranged just ready to be painted. Perhaps the only canvas where these defects are entirely absent is "The Sleeping Bloodhound," the strongest and simplest of his animal studies. Landseer was a fine draughtsman, but he failed to realise the power of colour, while his paint, especially in his more finished pictures, has, what Holman Hunt aptly terms, "a pomatumy texture." If you wish to prove the truth of this statement, study the large Equestrian picture, wherein the figure is painted by Millais and the animals by Landseer. Note the difference in the quality of the paint in the horse and in the lady. The contrast is too obvious to require comment; only in the dog, which is unfinished, is there any living quality in the texture of Landseer's paint.

What I have written in the foregoing paragraph is not intended as a dissertation against Landseer's work. He was simply the painter of his own age, and if his pictures are typical of its limitations, they also illustrate its achievements. M. de la Sizeranne has pointed out in

## THE TATE GALLERY

his illuminative book upon *English Contemporary Art*, that his pictures portray at least one great virtue. The intensity of expression with which Landseer almost invariably endows his animals is the presage of much that is strongest in our national art. It was this intensity which was to bring the renaissance of British painting.

The main exponents of the historic tradition were Daniel Maclise (1806-1870) and E. M. Ward (1816-1879). Maclise was the celebrated painter of his day, adored and imitated by numerous contemporaries, who diligently copied his faults. Endowed with the bane of facility he decorated miles of wall-space and painted unlimited yards of canvas. He was the Charles Dickens of painting, while Ward was the Walter Scott. The two painters were entrusted with the decoration of the Houses of Parliament. This was their best work. The original cartoon for the fresco, by Maclise, of Wellington meeting Blucher upon the field of Waterloo is preserved in the Diploma Gallery at Burlington House. It is necessary to see this work to in any way understand the popularity of this painter. The many figures are strongly drawn, and we realise his power as a draughtsman. This strength is absent from his easel pictures; they typify conventionalised art. "Malvolio and the Countess" and "The Play Scenes in *Hamlet*," his two pictures in the Tate Collection, may be taken as fair samples. They are vicious and trivial, false in sentiment, with untrue colour, arranged postures and set movements. We have only to look upon them to realise the slough of unreality

## PICTURES IN

into which historic painting had fallen, through blind clinging to stereotyped expression.

It is only fair to say there is more truth in the compositions of E. M. Ward. "Dr. Johnson in the Anteroom of Lord Chesterfield," "James II. receiving the News of the Landing of the Prince of Orange," and "The Scene in Change Alley at the time of the South Sea Bubble" are all well told stories. They are excellent in their realisation of the dresses and of the details, but they are very dull, and they are unrelieved by any gleam of true colour.

Midway between these groups of artists — the false historic and the pretty anecdotal — were the painters whose work may be classified as literary illustrations. Foremost among these interpreters of literary anecdote were C. R. Leslie (1794-1859) and G. S. Newton (1794-1835). Perhaps no picture among the early paintings in the Tate Gallery has the same dainty grace as Newton's "Yorick and the Grisette." Newton paints in the same spirit in which Oliver Goldsmith wrote — the same inexpressible charm pervades his work, like a scent of sweet lavender and mignonette or the songs of birds. Criticism is silenced. The painter carries us into the atmosphere of the *Sentimental Journey*. We forget to notice the disproportion of Yorick's figure, or the absurdities of the little dog conventionally posed in the foreground. We relinquish ourselves to enjoy the sweet humour of the scene; we picture Yorick with the beautiful *grisette*, measuring the gloves one by one across his hand.

## THE TATE GALLERY

In Leslie's pictures we have stories diluted with sportive humour. Holman Hunt writes of the painter in his diary:—

“Leslie was to me thoroughly insipid with sweet simplicity.”

It may be this judgment is somewhat severe. One merit Leslie had; he was able to depict fine shades of expression, and if these expressions are always trivial, they are often amusing. “Sancho Panza in the Apartment of the Duchess” is a depiction of harmless merriment, ruined by the cold colour and hard dry painting. It is typical of the manner in which Leslie conceived a literary scene.

His power was greater in simple incidents only necessitating the introduction of one or two figures. His best picture is the familiar “Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman.”

This story is known to every one.

“‘I protest, madame,’ said my Uncle Toby, ‘I can see nothing whatever in your eye.’

“‘Is it not in the white?’ said Mrs. Wadman. My Uncle Toby looked with might and main into the pupil.”

The humour of the scene is absolutely realised in the picture.

It is not easy to gather together all the scattered threads which unite the work of these early painters. We have indirectly referred to the classic tradition which coexisted with the more purely British expression of painted anecdote. William Etty (1789–1849), the head of these pseudo-classicists, was great in spite of his unreality and affectation.



## PICTURES IN

Through patient work he had mastered the painter's inherent difficulty of rendering the brilliancy of flesh. Look carefully at "Youth at the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm," or at "The Lute Player," or still more at "The Bather." In all the pictures the attitudes are stereotyped—nay worse, they are commonplace and at times almost vulgar; there is no new thought in the inspiration of the work, but for absolute beauty of flesh the paintings are difficult to surpass. Etty was an ardent student, again and again until he was quite old, he returned to the Academy schools to paint from the living model. He felt the joy of warm glowing flesh, and something of this joy he has left imprisoned upon his canvases.

Far different are the pictures of William Hilton (1786–1839). He was impelled with the same heroic ideal; his compositions have more thought and more refinement, but they lack Etty's personal instinct for colour. Hilton lived too late. As a painter of religious frescoes he might have achieved much; as it is, his pictures, even at their best, are imitations of greater masters. "Christ Crowned with Thorns" and "Nature Blowing Bubbles for her Children" both echo the memory of past ideals.

This brief, and of necessity inadequate, recital in no way exhausts the early Victorian painters represented in the Gallery. Of the landscape workers we shall speak in the next chapter, but apart from these many names have been omitted. No mention has been made of Sir Charles Eastlake's Italianised pictures, of the portrait by Hoppner, with its memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, of the eastern fables or village scenes of Frederick Goodall, of the fine



## THE TATE GALLERY

architectural work of David Roberts, or of the still life studies of George Lance. I have singled out the painters, who to me symbolised most clearly the tendencies of their age. Other workers may be grouped around them. These were years of little personality, when pictures were first of all illustrations, when sight was of more importance than insight, and art was very safe and not very ambitious.

And yet, in the midst of this iron-bound following of artistic convention, we here and there catch a sign that the slumber of apathy was breaking—that a fresh motive of individual struggle was soon to endow English art with new vitality. A careful inspection of these early pictures will often reveal unexpected characteristics. Let us take one or two instances. The notice paper which hangs upon the wall in Wilkie's "Parish Beadle" is painted with a loving exactitude, which suggests the work of the pre-Raphaelites. "The Boat House," by the sea-painter Edward Cooke, is a picture in which the subject is subordinate to the manner of treatment. Again the background to Leslie's "Uncle Toby and Widow Wadman" is entirely modern; there is even a hint of the impressionists in the indistinct lines of the suggested map, which hangs behind the figures. Examine a small portrait of Mrs. Anne Hawkins, by the landscape painter, John Linnell. Note the tenderness of the frill of white lace that circles the forehead. How it emphasises the character in this presentment of sweet and dignified age.

Space will not allow me to do more than suggest these thoughts. We find these pearls of originality when we diligently seek them. There were painters in this story-

## THE TATE GALLERY

telling epoch who remained unscathed by the prevailing fashion. William Dyce, born in the same year as Maclise, found for himself the truth of the new birth. His work we shall study in a later chapter. It only remains to speak of John Philip (1817-1867), a painter who worked in the midst of the old inspiration and yet retained the individuality of his expression.

This artist did not paint to illustrate an anecdote, to insist a moral, to teach a lesson, or to follow tradition. He painted because he loved colour, and because he joyed in the scene he fashioned. Nor was it in the intention of his art only that Philip was in advance of his age. His broad strong brush-work and pure colour alone would distinguish him from the niggling technique of his fellow artists.

Whence came this difference?

In 1851 Philip went to Spain, and it is not overstating the truth to say that he owed his artistic awakening to Velazquez. He understood what Wilkie had never fathomed, that the only way to follow the Spanish master was by increasing the power of his own vision. Personality is the keynote of the painter's work. Of his three pictures at Millbank "The Prison Window" is the finest. It is a picture with a story, yet instinctively we realise it was not painted for that reason. The scene was selected for its pictorial possibilities, and is realised in a lovely scheme of colour. The beauty of the figures is the outcome of the painting, the paint is not merely used to clothe them. It is this which places "Spanish Philip" apart, an artist among many painters.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY LANDSCAPE PAINTERS



## CHAPTER III

### THE EARLY LANDSCAPE PAINTERS



THE earliest landscape in the Tate Gallery is the scene near Higham, Norfolk, by old John Crome. Two oak trees by a road-side, a pool reflecting some worn palings, some wind-driven stumps, a low thorn hedge, and behind a strong background of luminous sky—such is the picture, perfectly simple, and yet wholly complete.

“‘John, my boy!’ the old painter charged his son when he died, ‘paint, but paint for fame; and if your subject is only a pigsty—dignify it!’”

Here is the artistic verity that in a picture subject is secondary to treatment.

Many of the early landscape artists realised this truth, and it was this which to a large extent liberated them from the conventional falseness of contemporary painting. Probably their realisation was instinctive, it grew from their joy in the scenes they painted; but their work gained, rather than lost, from their unconsciousness. Nature love has always been a deep-rooted instinct among the British people. No other nation except the Dutch have the same genuine and widespread appreciation of local scenery. And



## PICTURES IN

this universal, this inherent impulse was the inspiration of English landscape art.

It must not be thought that the Claudian ideal of traditional classicism was dead. Richard Wilson, the artist who first painted light, and the earliest English landscapist of moment, regarded Nature as a grand background for heroic effects. His love of scenic grandeur at times led him into unconscious humour. He was commanded by George III. to execute a picture of Kew Gardens; the scene produced was an Italian vista, warmed by a brilliant southern sun! But the immediate influence Wilson exercised was slight. Landscape art found a truer sire in Thomas Gainsborough, and by his example a new element was introduced into Nature painting. For the first time English scenery was painted for its local interest, in relation to rural life. Naturally, much of this painter's work was guided by the spirit of the moment, but he was a sincere student of Nature, and a large proportion of his achievement bears the imprint of this inspiration. Gainsborough painted the impression of Nature as reflected in his own mind, and by thus doing he gave the first blow to those scenes of make-believe that had been built by the hand of tradition.

Gainsborough died in 1788, twelve years after Constable was born, and at the time Crome was still painting true landscape in Norfolk. The young painter Constable trod in their footprints, intensifying the love of local scenery with the power of his personal interpretation.

"When I sit down to paint a point of view I have chosen, I first strive to forget I have ever seen a picture."

## THE TATE GALLERY

This was the spirit in which Constable worked. He realised the wondrous play of light, and this turned his landscapes into living scenes. Slowly he fought his way through strong opposition, refusing to paint brown where he saw green. He discarded the customary tree, the last fetish of arranged landscape.

"I paint for posterity," he cried with the firm faith of strong genius. And the prophecy was true. Constable's painting worked a revolution, which changed the landscape ideal not only in England but also in France. In that country the fruit of his example yielded a full and immediate harvest in the work of the Barbizon painters.

Five small canvases by Constable enrich the Tate Gallery. To see his most important pictures we must go to the National Gallery, but his least sketch gives a very complete idea of the personality of his work. Three of the scenes were painted near his early home in Suffolk, "The House where the Artist was born," "The Bridge at Gillingham," and "The Church Porch at Bergholt." Two are views of Hampstead Heath, while one is a seascape of the old wooden look-out house at Harwich. They are small transcripts of the views depicted, made beautiful by the truth of colour, and by the rare quality of atmosphere. We see each scene as it was mirrored in the painter's vision.

"The Salt Box, Hampstead Heath" is low in tone, and yet it is full of light, the glad warm light of hot summer. The sky is limpid blue, flecked with clouds of soft grey, while the horizon is a deep blue. Perhaps the near trees are a little heavy, but the grass is a fresh green.

## PICTURES IN

A road and the gravel pit in the foreground are painted in tones that are warm and yet subdued. A gleam of colour is given by a man's red jacket, while the whole scheme is relieved by the white sleeve of the man's shirt, and this note is repeated in the light wall of the house in the middle distance. The picture has the inevitable charm of a beautiful and personally realised scene.

No solitary example of Turner's work enriches the Tate Gallery, yet one word about the great master it is necessary to say. His genius was so personal, so entirely the outgrowth of inspiration, that he stands alone, a Titan, impossible to imitate and difficult to follow. Probably the only picture in the Tate Gallery which directly shows his influence, is the water-colour painting of Windsor Castle, by Alfred Hunt, the modern disciple of his manner. Turner formed no school of landscape art, and his painting belongs to the world rather than to any country.

In these years a new standard for landscape art arose in England, fostered, as we have seen, by the influence of Constable and John Crome. Reality of vision now walked hand in hand with the relics of lingering tradition.

A curious illustration of these dual influences is seen in "The Valley of the Yare," the picture by James Stark (1794-1859), a pupil of old Crome. Here we find Nature upon the right, and tradition upon the left, two distinct manners united in one canvas. The undulating ground, with its cornfield and meadow-land, the trees, the road down which a cart and a band of reapers are passing, form a calm rustic scene, painted in the spirit of the Norwich master. In the opposite half of the canvas, on

## THE TATE GALLERY

the other hand, we see a regulation ruin rising in the midst of a landscape, arranged in scenic panorama. Cut the picture into two, and one half would seem to be an early study by Crome, while the other would appear a bad copy of a classic scene.

This intermingling of motives may be traced in many early landscapes. "The Temples of Pœstum," by William Linton (1791-1876), is one of the last instances of a large scene painted entirely in "the grand style." Its feebleness proves how surely the old order was waning. A memory of Gainsborough's sweetness lingers in Thomas Creswick's (1811-1869) "Pathway to the Village Church." The colouring is raw and dull. "Creswick tries for real green, but ends in green paint instead of green light," was the remark of Ruskin. To how many painters could not this verdict be applied?

Greater individuality will be seen in the pictures of John Linnell (1792-1882), whose work as a portrait-painter we have already noted. In his landscapes Linnell was a mannerist, hovering midway between the new and the old ideals. To a certain extent his style was moulded by his master, John Varley, a foundation member of the Old Water-Colour Society. But the truth is Linnell had two sides to his art; in one he was bound by the old accepted canons of what a landscape ought to contain, and how it ought to look; in the other an out-of-door freshness, a breeziness of the fields, saved his work from triviality. The same diversity may be traced in his actual handling. In one scene we are charmed by the glowing colour and the free strong brush-work, in another the tints are dull



## PICTURES IN

and unmeaning and the manner of painting coarse and heavy. Often in the same canvas we are repelled and delighted. In "The Windmill" the clouds are drawn with modern vigour, every plane is absolutely true, but the light that breaks the dark cumuli of the sky is forced; a fine effect is spoilt and a simple scene is made theatrical. In many of his pictures the figures are out of scale, and in most cases the landscape would be better were they removed. Never is Linnell's art great, yet his pictures have profound interest, for in them we see the first example of the new manner applied to the old scenes, with their want of imagination. His work is a kind of bridge suspended between the past and the present.

In the midst of this duality of motive, a few painters worked who were endowed with more distinctive personality. William Müller (1812-1845), Richard Parkes Bonington (1801-1828), Paul Falconer Poole (1807-1879), and Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), are unlike in all else, but in this they are united—they worked with little regard to the prevailing artistic tendencies. This is true in full of the first two painters, and in a modified measure of Poole and Stanfield.

No one can look at Müller's pictures without being strongly conscious of their personality. I remember the first time I saw his "Street Scene in Cairo" I did not then know his work, but at once it became a reality to me. Immediately I sought his other pictures, and in each I recognised the same strong expression. The work was not technically perfect, but it was alive—alive with glowing colour and strong free handling.



## THE TATE GALLERY

"I paint in oil on the spot," Müller wrote in 1842. "I am convinced of *the actual necessity* of looking at Nature." And again, "I want to paint; it is oozing out of my fingers."

This is the voice which speaks from Müller's works.

Note the chord of strong colour in that Eastern street scene—the flaming sky, gold red between those piles of buildings. At a first swift glance the canvas gleams with fire; the colour is very pure, the touch is absolutely certain, everything is toned down to enhance the glory of that central glow.

Now look at a small canvas called "A Landscape: a River Scene." Müller's pictures leap forward for half a century. It is a very modern subject handled in a modern manner. There is no forced note, no building-up of a picture, no figure is introduced to interfere with the wildness of the scene—nothing except rocks and turbid, hurling water, while behind is a sky, dark with the black gloom of night. It is a transcript wrested from Nature without embellishment. Müller died at thirty-three, literally consumed by the passion to create. He never gained recognition, and his failure saddened his life.

Very similar was the history of Richard Parkes Bonington. He too died in early manhood, and his power was unrecognised by his country. "England has too lightly yielded us the glory of this young genius," writes M. Chesneau in *The English School of Painting*. At the age of fifteen Bonington went to France, where he first copied pictures in the Louvre, and afterwards worked in the studio of Baron Gros. In spite of this training Bonington never

## PICTURES IN

acquired a French manner. He spent his life in France and Italy, and yet his work was always unmistakably English. His pictures are painted with pure strong colour, while he frequently worked in water-colour, the distinctive English medium. In fine, Bonington gave to France far more than he absorbed. His years of work aided the revolution Constable effected, and young as he was, his inspiration was acknowledged in French landscape.

"The Column of St. Mark's, Venice," and a small water-colour study of "Old Cheyne Walk, Chelsea," his two pictures at Millbank, do not reveal all the greatness of his power. Yet the Venetian scene is notable for its full clear colour and strong brush-work. Many of his works are in the Wallace Collection. A picture of "Margaret of Navarre and Francis I." is a supreme example of his skill in historical genre. His sketch-book and several brilliant drawings may be seen in the Print Room of the British Museum.

Paul Falconer Poole was more conscious of the influence of his contemporaries. His work is a combination of tradition and realism, translated into a personal language of mystic fancy. Often he fails as a painter; he was self-trained, and his figures, though carefully drawn, are generally feeble, while his faces are invariably expressionless. Yet we forgive much for the thought hidden in the work. At times his scenes are almost grand. A weird earnestness characterises his landscape, and here and there in the colour we catch a hint of Venetian splendour.

"The Vision of Ezekiel" illustrates his limitations and his strange power. It is not a literal study; it is a scene of fancy woven from the prophet's words: "And I looked,

## THE TATE GALLERY

and behold a whirlwind came from the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself."

There is something very nearly great in this fiery storm-tossed scene of realised fancy. Poole is one of the few English painters who have attempted imaginative landscape. His modern representative is Albert Goodwin, whose scenes of fairy fancy may be studied at Millbank. Possibly if their pictures fail, the failure arises from the fact that they have tried to paint scenes that are unpaintable.

Over the work of Clarkson Stansfield it is unnecessary to linger. He is noted as the first English painter of the sea. He worked patiently from Nature, and his boats are always well painted, while his matter-of-fact seas are true, if a little commonplace. He misses the poetry of deep waters, nor does he realise the sea's colour. His work is photographic and without personal illumination, while his skies are cold and dull in tone.

No mention has yet been made of the water-colour painters. There is no question that the birth of water-colour painting as a distinct art, in the middle years of the eighteenth century, was an event with few parallels in the history of painting. But we may not dwell here upon this awakening, so pregnant with good in its effect upon landscape work. Unfortunately the water-colour paintings in the Tate Gallery are few, and even among these the majority are unimportant. Several architectural studies by Paul Sandby, a design for the Freemasons' Hall by his brother Thomas, two slight seascapes by John Varley, a number of studies in charcoal and sepia, and

## THE TATE GALLERY

one fine water-colour by George Cattermole, a trio of small sketches by David Cox, and a scene in Richmond Park by William Bennet, have been recently presented to the Gallery. They convey little idea of the power and beauty of this distinctly English art. Perhaps the most beautiful of the old water-colours is an exquisite little view of Sussex by Copley Fielding.

## CHAPTER IV

### LANDSCAPE PAINTERS

GEORGE VICAT COLE (1833-1893)

JOHN MACWHIRTER (BORN 1839)





## CHAPTER IV

LANDSCAPE PAINTERS: GEORGE VICAT COLE (1833-1893);

JOHN MACWHIRTER (BORN 1839)



IN the last chapter we have traced the record of landscape art during the first half of the nineteenth century. We have seen the conflict between tradition, and naturalism, wherein the victory in the main was with the latter. But this triumph of Nature-study carried an attendant danger in its track. Gradually a tendency arose to substitute reproduction for interpretation, and in this way a realism of surface became the aim of the landscape painters. In their effort to copy Nature they lost breadth of insight; they painted in detached local colour and forgot the subtlety of light. And in this way landscape art tended to lose individuality, almost as surely as by the old ideals of classic presentment. It is not the function of a painted scene to be a photographic duplicate of Nature. The truer aim of a picture is to show us what the artist saw, that which he saw as no other man could see it; indeed, the power of a landscape depends upon the depth and freshness of this realisation. The work of many painters testifies that this worship of the outward

## PICTURES IN

form of Nature was a very real danger at this period. Vicat Cole and Sidney Cooper, among many others, belong to this group of little selective and unimaginative landscape painters.

I have classified these two artists together because they were impelled by the same spirit. They are the veritable artistic offspring of Linnell. Their manner of painting is modern; they each worked directly from Nature, but what they missed was the power of true, and yet creative, realisation. Endowed in a large measure with sight they possessed little insight. Sidney Cooper painted cattle, Vicat Cole Surrey landscapes and Thames vistas. These pictures are always pretty and well drawn, yet we miss something, for the bright colour has no true effect of sunlight, while the realisation of the scene shows us less, not more, than we could have noted for ourselves.

It is interesting to trace the varied sources from which Vicat Cole drew his early inspiration. His teacher was his father, Mr. George Cole, Vice-President of the Society of British Artists, an animal and landscape painter of some note. The artistic ideals of his son were Constable, Cox, and Turner, and while still a boy he made many diligent copies of their work in black and white. Upon this somewhat eclectic foundation Vicat Cole moulded his expression. He was a rapid worker, innumerable out-of-door studies were taken in addition to detailed nature notes, especially of atmospheric effects. Many of these sketches are reproduced in the interesting Monograph upon the painter's work by his brother-in-law, Mr. R. Chignell. He tells us that at first the painter

## THE TATE GALLERY

finished his pictures in the fields, but that in later years he worked in the studio from sketches taken upon the spot.

At the age of nineteen Vicat Cole's first picture, "A Surrey Common," was exhibited at the Royal Institute of British Artists, but it was not until 1860 that his work gained attention. In that year a picture of "A Surrey Cornfield," which had been sent to the Academy, was universally praised. From this time the painter's career was one of continued success. Each season his Surrey scenes, with their pastoral picturesqueness became more popular. Millais writing of one of these pictures describes it as "A sea of golden corn in the slanting rays of the sunset."

A typical instance of these English pastorals is "An Autumn Morning," the painter's diploma picture, now at Burlington House. It is an unmistakable Surrey landscape of corn and mist, with bright autumnal colouring.

The year 1881 was an important one in Vicat Cole's life. At the suggestion of Mr. Agnew he undertook to complete a series of pictures illustrating the Thames from its source to the sea. He bent the entire energy of his nature to this work, which, his biographer tells us, he regarded as a national one. From this year until his death in 1893 he passed much of his time in his floating-studio, the steam-launch *Blanche*. Here he made innumerable sketches of the river banks, of stretches of water, and of varied effects of weather, all of which were afterwards used in painting his pictures.

It is not necessary to trace the history of these scenes.

## PICTURES IN

Every place of interest was pictured. "He followed the stream with faithful brush throughout its length."

"The Pool of London," now in the National Collection, is the most important picture of the series. For long Vicat Cole had desired to paint this scene. Mr. Chignell tells us that as early as 1878, ten years before the picture was completed, an entry appears in his diary, stating that he was "designing for a large picture of the Pool."

Without doubt this picture is Vicat Cole's finest work. It is a scenic rather than a realistic representation of the river, wherein landscape smoke and sky are arranged to correspond with the painter's design. The conception has more poetry and depth than the Surrey landscapes. The work is picturesque and romantic, but it is not imaginative.

To realise the full force of this fact, it is only necessary to compare "The Pool" with another picture of almost the same scene also in the Gallery. Mr. W. L. Wyllie's "Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide" depicts the river just below the Pool. In this realisation nothing is changed, every detail is painted literally, but the scene is illumined by the interpretation of the artist's vision. The two pictures illustrate the gulf that rests between depicting a scene and translating an effect of Nature.

A new vitality was brought into landscape painting by the rise of the Scottish school in the middle years of the century. In a later chapter I shall speak again, and more fully, of this new force in British art. At that point we shall have reached the event in its true chronological order,





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THE POOL OF LONDON.  
G. VICAT COLE, R.A.



## THE TATE GALLERY

for the Scottish school belongs to a period after the pre-Raphaelite revival. But in art history a limit of dates is often arbitrary, and the mid-century British landscapists belong to the old ideal of art rather than to the new. They clung to the realism of form; they did not comprehend the truer realism of personal impression.

John MacWhirter and Peter Graham were the chief landscapists of the Scottish movement. Broadly speaking, the aim of all the young Scotch painters was to obtain colour in their work. Through the influence of their master, Robert Scott Lauder, they had become conscious of the glowing splendour of Venetian colour. To effect their purpose they painted in detached shades of rich local colour, interlacing their tints much in the same manner as a weaver of rich stuffs entwines his threads. The landscape workers strove to obtain the glistening effect of an out-of-door scene by rendering every colour in detail; following the doctrine of Mr. Ruskin, they toiled after the infinity of Nature. But in their effort to obtain colour, they forgot the subtlety of light; each object was faithfully imitated with its own actual colour, but the unity of the whole scheme was rarely attained. Their landscapes are a mass of beautifully isolated tints rather than a coherent effect of colour harmony.

The result of this insistence upon detailed colour is also manifest in their design. We see it in their treatment of light and shade, in their choice of subject; indeed it controls every department of their work. They did not see their landscapes as an entire image mirrored in their imagination, but as a series of colour results to be carefully

## PICTURES IN

noted. And thus they show us in their pictures a number of elaborately arranged effects, but they fail to convey to us an impression of the scene. They are recorders and not interpreters of Nature. And it is for this reason I have said their realism was still the realism of outward form.

A further result of this sectional and limited outlook upon Nature was a tendency to regard a landscape from the conventional standpoint. Originality of artistic insight does not result from chronicling incidents, however beautiful they may be, but from meditating upon them, until they are seen in a new and illumined aspect.

Thus we must expect from the Scotch landscapists the preconceived idea of the places they paint. Peter Graham's Highland scenes are always misty or rainy, while his rivers are always in spate.

In the work of J. MacWhirter there is greater diversity, and probably he was the first to paint Swiss flowers, but he also has cared more for conventional beauty of detail than for largeness of impression. His Scotch scenes, his Italian vistas, and his Swiss meadows are all pretty, but they have not the breadth of a scene realised as one complete vision, and none of his work attains greatness. Compare his studies of trees with the trees of Cecil Lawson and this difference will at once be felt. One painter gives us a picture of a tree, the other the tree itself, standing encircled with light.

The Life of John MacWhirter is marked by no incidents of striking moment. His deep love of Nature, and especially of trees and flowers, was inherited from





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JUNE IN THE AUSTRIAN TYROL.  
J. MACWHIRTER, R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

his father, Mr. George MacWhirter, a paper-maker of Colinton, Edinburgh. The boy always seems to have been able to draw, and his first picture, "An Old Cottage at Braid," was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1854, before he had attained his fifteenth year. We have already spoken of his training in the Trustees Academy, under the able mastership of Robert Scott Lauder. Among his fellow students were Orchardson, Pettie, Peter Graham, Tom Graham, William MacTaggart, John Hutchinson, and others, the young founders of the Scotch school. Rare, indeed, is it for such a group of painters to be gathered around one master. In 1865 a picture of "The Temple of Vesta, Rome" was hung in the English Academy, and a few years later MacWhirter came to live in London.

"June in the Austrian Tyrol" was exhibited at the Academy in 1892. The picture is a view of Gosaw, in the Salzkammergut. But the location of the scene matters little, for the work is not an impression of a place; it is a beautiful rendering of a meadow foreground. The vast power of a land of snow-wreathed mountains is not given to us in the picture. The greatest themes cannot be detailed; the grandeur of Switzerland can only be realised as an impression that has been seized and afterwards interpreted. To those who know the exquisite Swiss mountain vistas of Mr. Millie Dow this fact will at once be clear. In this picture the beauty does not rest in the mountain background, but in its meadows, bordered in blue and white with unnumbered flowers. The sparkling tints of colour have something of the iridescent sheen of Nature.

## THE TATE GALLERY

We are reminded of another foreground of flowers, painted in words by Mr. Ruskin: "There sprang up year by year such a company of joyful flowers as I know not the like of, among all the blessings of the earth. It was springtime, too, and all were coming forth in clusters, crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes, only to be near each other. There was the wood anemone, star after star, closing now and then into nebulæ; and there was the oxalis, troop by troop, like virginal processions of the *mois de Marie*, and ever and anon a blue gush of violets and cowslip-bells in sunny places; and in the more open ground the vetch, and comfrey, and mezereon, and the small sapphire buds of the *Polygala Alpina*, and the wild strawberry, just a blossom or two, all showered amid the golden softness of deep, warm, amber-coloured moss."

CHAPTER V

THE FORERUNNERS OF THE  
PRE-RAPHAELITE REVIVAL





## CHAPTER V

### THE FORERUNNERS OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITE REVIVAL:

WILLIAM DYCE (1806-1864); J. F. LEWIS (1805-1876); FORD MADDOX BROWN (1821-1893)



WE must now return to the opening years of the nineteenth century, to the period of conflict when Nature and Tradition were still striving for the artistic arena. It has seemed necessary to dwell at some length in what we may call the vestibule of British art. Only by realising the character of our national painting, in this stage of its development, is it possible to appreciate the effect of the pre-Raphaelite movement. I have striven to point out how amidst tradition, classicism, story-telling, prosaic landscape, and all the fetters of commonplace expression, individuality was not dead. Again and again we have met curious anticipations of the new ideal; the seeds were hidden, but they were in the ground waiting to germinate.

"William Dyce must be ranked among the pre-Raphaelites," writes Mr. J. E. Hodgson in his interesting pamphlet *Fifty Years of British Art*.

The truth of this estimate may readily be proved by studying "Pegwell Bay," and "St. John leading the Virgin

## PICTURES IN

from the Tomb," Dyce's two pictures in the Tate Gallery. It will be noted that I use the word "study." This I do advisedly. Speaking in his *Academy Notes* of 1857, of a picture by William Dyce, Mr. Ruskin wrote, "It will take about an hour to see it properly." This appreciation is absolutely true; the pictures of this painter must be studied and not merely looked at.

Description is of little avail in speaking of such work, its merit is too thoughtful; its extreme reserve and absolute quietness will not readily permit of illustration. How personal is the conception, how intimate the manner of rendering, how careful is the brush-work, and yet how free! Notice in his sacred picture the purity of the colours, the absolute sincerity in the painting of the details. Each spine of the fleshy-leaved cactus, the down of the thistle-seed, every minute feature of the foreground is exquisitely realised. The flowing strands of the Virgin's hair, the embroidery of the dresses, the marked tiles that circle the tomb, all are faithfully painted. Yet the scene is not a copy of Nature, it is rather an interpretation. The quiet beauty of the Virgin is conceived with the utmost simplicity and power. Her figure is draped in a robe of clear red, half covered with a cloak of dark pure blue; she carries in her hand the Crown of Thorns that has wounded her Son. Her face has something of the combined mystery, pathos, sorrow and simplicity that inspires the Virgins of the Primitives in Italian painting.

The conception of St. John has less power; the drapery that shrouds his feet is stiff, and we do not realise the limbs that move beneath the folds. The weak drawing of

## THE TATE GALLERY

the four figures in the distance may also be criticised. But these defects count for little; they are forgotten in the supreme dignity of the work.

This sincerity and quietness is also apparent in the picture of "Pegwell Bay." It is unnecessary to particularise the details of the scene. The paint is laid thinly upon the canvas with sable brushes, and this gives the work something of the translucent brightness of a water-colour. Beauty is gained by the mastery of the aerial perspective. The true values of the colours in their relation to light are perfectly given; there is no forced note, and the harmony of the work is complete.

Holman Hunt speaks of Dyce's painting as being "most profoundly trained and cultivated." "Had he had a better chance he might have influenced the English school strongly," is the estimate of the pre-Raphaelite. Yet William Dyce never gained fame; and the sum total of his record was disappointment, and his work remained unnoticed.

Mr. Ruskin has acclaimed J. F. Lewis as the pioneer of the pre-Raphaelite movement. In *the Arrows of the Chace* he writes: "J. F. Lewis worked with the sternest precision twenty years before Pre-Raphaelitism had ever been heard of; pursued calmly the same principles, developed by himself, for himself, through years of lonely labour in Syria." Mr. Ruskin speaks of his work as "exquisitely and ineffably right," while again he says, "It is amazing that there should be so Much, but far more amazing that this Much should be all right."

But careful multiplicity of detail, however beautiful and however right, will not in itself produce a work of art. It

## PICTURES IN

is not the aim of a picture to enter into competition with Nature. True art interprets, it does not reproduce. J. F. Lewis may have anticipated the pre-Raphaelite manner of realising a scene in detail exactly as it exists in Nature. But this theory was a very small part of the English renaissance, little more than a precept for the guidance of study; and his work is without the personality and intensity that were the vital spirit of the movement.

His two pictures at Millbank, "Edfou, Upper Egypt," and "The Courtyard of the Coptic Patriarch's House in Cairo," are like archæological museums of Eastern scenes. Every detail is marvellously painted, but there is no totality of effect, no intention behind the conception.

The true interest in the work arises from the rendering of Eastern sunlight. The paint is laid on with delicate brush-work in tints of pure colour, while the play of light is carefully regarded. The effect strangely foreshadows the work of the modern *plein air* painters.

It was during these years of re-awakened thought that a young English painter, trained in Antwerp and working in Paris, where he was surrounded by traditional art, discovered for himself the truth that personality is necessary in art.

"It was in Paris," said Ford Madox Brown, "I first formed my idea of making my pictures real, because no French painter did so."

It is possible that this craving for artistic personality may have originated in some such boyish impulse of opposition, but the foundations rested far deeper. Madox Brown was born an independent thinker. He was not



## THE TATE GALLERY

so much a revolutionary as an earnest reformer. It was not his desire to destroy art, but rather to recreate it. "In his heart was a vague but ardent longing," says M. Sizeranne, "to see art in England taking a great social place, the place of daily bread, instead of being a mere sweetmeat reserved for the rich man's table."

How was this to be accomplished?

To Ford Madox Brown there was but one way. The artist must first of all be himself, while his painting must be the direct record of his patient, steadfast and detailed study. Art was dying from the continual repetition of worn-out formulas. For tradition must be substituted personality, and for accepted methods individual research.

Some such creed as this animated the strong character of the young apostle. He never openly enrolled himself among the artistic revivalists; yet, if truth, self-denial, sincerity, enthusiasm—the work of an individual soul rather than the parrot repetition of artistic platitudes—means anything, then Madox Brown was a pre-Raphaelite of the pre-Raphaelites. His work, records his friend Mr. F. G. Stephens, "is the true archetype, if such a thing ever existed, of the movement in its primitive and self-denying stage."

Madox Brown was the grandson of John Brown, a physician of Scottish descent, who was the founder of the system of medicine that is called after his name. Probably it was from this source the painter drew his independence of thought, for surely it was more than a coincidence that he should accomplish in art what his grandsire had achieved in medicine. His father, Ford



## PICTURES IN

Brown, was a commissary in the British navy, while his mother was a Kentish lady, Miss Caroline Madox. Their child was born at Calais on 16th of April 1821. Almost from boyhood the boy's power in drawing was manifest. All possible assistance was given to train his talent; indeed the distinctive point of his artistic education was its thoroughness. At the age of thirteen he was placed by his father under Professor Gregorius of Bruges; somewhat later he worked with Heer Van Hanselaer, at the Academy of Ghent, while his last master was Baron Wappers, a teacher renowned throughout Europe for his technical accomplishment. The result of this training was that the young painter acquired perfect command of his medium. In this he was like the old masters; he could work with equal facility in oils, water-colour, pastels, fresco and encaustic, while he knew the use of the etcher's needle and the lithographer's stone. His period of apprenticeship passed in ardent and systematised toil; for five years he worked eight or nine hours each day painting life-sized heads. Not until this period had passed did he feel ready to execute his first picture, "A Blind Beggar and his Son."

These are facts that cannot be neglected. Madox Brown knew nothing of the desultory training often deemed a sufficient equipment for genius. To him his "ten talents" carried with them the responsibility of increase. Perfect mastery was necessary for the acquirement of style; his technical knowledge must be sufficiently complete to enable it to be forgotten. Only in this way could he rise to the dignity of historical art. And to him this did not mean

## THE TATE GALLERY

reproducing by elaborate detail scenes that were dead, but treating all subjects in the spirit of great historical art.

The years 1843 and 1844 were memorable in Madox Brown's life. He took part in the cartoon competitions at Westminster, a national opportunity which incited the ambitions of all English painters. His cartoon of the "Bringing the Body of Harold to the Conqueror" was noteworthy for its profound expression and complete technical acquirement. An abstract representation of "Justice," exhibited in the following year, was scarcely less notable. This note occurs in Haydon's diary after he had visited the collection: "Passed the morning at Westminster Hall. The only bit of fresco fit to look at is by Ford Brown. It is a figure of 'Justice,' and exquisite as far as that figure goes."

Other pictures completed in these early years were "Job and his Friends," exhibited at Ghent; "The Giaour's Confession," sent to the Academy in 1841; and "Parisina's Sleep," and "Manfred on the Jungfrau," painted in Paris. In addition there were sundry portraits and a number of rough sketches—notably some illustrations of King Lear, remarkable for their power of gesture and intensity of the facial expressions.

This work is tentative in effort, for Madox Brown had not yet found his individual manner. He tells us that the heads in "Parisina's Sleep" were inspired by Rembrandt and the Spanish pictures, while "Manfred on the Jungfrau" was his first attempt at an out-of-door effect of light. The technical excellence of the handling is great, while all the work reveals style, and a strongly realised dramatic instinct.

## PICTURES IN

In 1845 Madox Brown went for two years to Italy. "No spirit that has once drunk of those pure founts can long remain in bondage to any other influence," is his comment on the effect of the Italian masters upon his work. Again he writes in a note upon his picture of "Our Ladye of Good Children": "Italian art made a deep, and as it proved lasting impression upon me, for I never afterwards returned to the sombre Rembrandtesque style I had formerly worked in."

Upon his return from Italy Madox Brown settled in London. A few of his early pictures, and especially the Westminster cartoons, had aroused the ardent admiration of young Gabriel Rossetti. The story of the impulsive lad seeking him, and hailing him as master, is known to every one. With loving generosity Brown accepted his homage, and for many years he strove to help and train the somewhat untrainable genius of the younger painter.

In this way Madox Brown was brought into friendly connection with the future pre-Raphaelites. When the brotherhood was formed in the autumn of 1848, he was earnestly invited to become a member. This he never did. He was older than the youthful triad—probably he had less belief in brotherhoods; while one of their early tenets that a model, once selected, must be absolutely copied without judgment or reservation, he knew to be absurd. He remained the friend, and to a certain extent the counsellor of the brotherhood. And it is not fanciful to believe they drew inspiration from his work.

It would be superfluous to give in detail the struggles

## THE TATE GALLERY

and stern labour which make up the story of Madox Brown's life. Certain pictures stand forth in the record as milestones, which chronicle his artistic growth.

The picture of "Chaucer Reading the Legend of Custance to Edward III." may be taken as a transition work, marking the boundary between his earlier and his later manner. The figures are conceived and grouped somewhat in the manner of the earlier historical cartoons, but the notes of colour are brighter and the shadows less deep. There is more of the glowing joy of Southern colouring, though the scene is not presented in sunlight.

"This is the first picture," wrote Madox Brown, "in which I endeavoured to treat light and shade absolutely as it exists at any one moment."

Even of greater import is "Lear and Cordelia," a work painted in 1848 and 1849. This picture marks a significant stage in the expansion of Madox Brown's growth. It was the work in which artistically he found himself. "It is my first picture in my present or English manner," he writes. And again, "I have always considered this one of my chief works." The depth of meaning, the refinement, the suggestiveness of the detail, the intellectuality of the subject, the meaning and unconvention of the attitudes, the restrained significance of gestures, the clear, vivid and distinct colouring—all these essentially national traits are revealed in the picture. It is this power which has made Madox Brown's influence permanent in the English renaissance. More strongly than any of his contemporaries, he reflects the restrained strength, united with suggestive intention that was the true spirit of the pre-Raphaelite



## PICTURES IN

revival. In his work we see the distinctive merits of our national expression realised with fine technical ability.

In 1854 Madox Brown painted "Christ washing Peter's Feet," the picture which perhaps expresses most clearly the completeness of his power. The work is supremely strong; it is great in its intention, and the conception of the scene speaks to the beholder with deep suggestion. Look at the gleaming colour in the red copper bowl, and the rich full tones of the colour scheme. Note the vigour and the strangeness of Peter's crouching attitude, and the combined reserve and dignity of the figure of the Christ. Mark the expression of the Apostles—St. John upon the right with his chin stretched forward upon his hands, Judas stooping to clasp his sandal, the disciples gathered around the table, each figure in a posture of strange intensity. Again, I would say, notice these things if you would realise how new and how great was Madox Brown's art. The picture has much of the dignity of the old masters; it is one of the supreme works of our country. Half a century after it was painted, it was bought by a body of subscribers and presented to the nation.

It is interesting to note in the painter's diary, that twelve days before sending the picture to the Academy, "he gave it up in despair." It was Millais who persuaded him to continue the work, and in ten days the heads of Christ, and Peter, and John were repainted.

Almost every figure in the picture is a portrait. Four members of the pre-Raphaelite band are represented. Holman Hunt and Rossetti sit together near the centre of the table, the Christ and St. John are portraits of F. G. Stephens





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CHRIST WASHING PETER'S FEET.  
FORD MADDOX BROWN.



## THE TATE GALLERY

and Walter Howell Deverell, two members of the brotherhood; while among the group of apostles upon the left of the picture are Holman Hunt's father, Charles Bagot Cayley, and Mr. William Michael Rossetti.

Many pictures were painted after this time. "The Last of England" was inspired by the emigration movement of 1852. Here at length we view a scene of contemporary life depicted with a dignity of thought, a clear beauty of colour, and a skill of craftsmanship, which raises it to the level of great art. "Absolutely without regard to the art of any period or country I have tried to render the scene as it would appear," is the simple statement of Madox Brown. And by this personal interpretation he has created a master work, great and dignified; a scene of intimate history, perfectly true and perfectly natural.

"Work," the drama of nineteenth century life, was begun at Hampstead in 1859. It is painted with the utmost faithfulness of detail, and the scene is pregnant with suggestion. Less great than "The Last of England" in the power of its pictorial design, it is noteworthy from its concentration and literary thought. "Romeo and Juliet," "The Death of Sir Tristram," "Cordelia's Portion," and "King René's Honeymoon," are pictures of a different character. They are perfect examples of Romance illustration. "Cordelia's Portion" is magnificent in its restrained yet passionate intensity. Every attitude and every gesture speaks. The painter's final work was executing the twelve mural panels for the Town Hall of Manchester, illustrating the history of the city.

These were the closing act in the drama of a great life,

## THE TATE GALLERY

for Ford Madox Brown was a great man as well as a great painter. Pre-eminently his art was the outcome of his character. How willingly we would linger over the pages of his diary, wherein we read a record of supreme power yoked with fine restraint. The man who laboured incessantly, often beginning his work with the first flush of dawn, writes with perfect simplicity: "I must strive and struggle against indolence." With what sorrow we note the entry made in August 1854: "Oh the hell of poverty." But it was not often that bitterness seared Madox Brown's strong spirit.

Let one extract, taken from his diary, speak for the greatness of the man. He is writing of his work, prior to painting the picture of "Chaucer reading his Poems in the Court of Edward III.": "Whether the picture will ever deserve the pains I am now taking remains to be seen; very likely it may only add to the many kicks I have already received from fortune. If so, I am quite able to bear it, and despise her. Of one thing she cannot rob me—the pleasure I have already extracted—distilled I may say—from the very work itself. Warned by bitter experience, I have learnt not to trust only to hope for my reward, nor consider my toil as a sacrifice, but to value the *present*, the pleasure I have received, and daily yet receive, from the working out of a subject after my own heart."

## CHAPTER VI

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: GABRIEL CHARLES  
DANTE ROSSETTI (1828-1882)





## CHAPTER VI

### THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: GABRIEL CHARLES

DANTE ROSSETTI (1828-1882)



THE story of the founding of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood has been told and re-told with many variations. The meeting of three painters, little more than lads, the finding of a book of engravings from the frescoes in the Campo Santo of Pisa, such was the simple event, but to these insignificant incidents must be added a threefold power of enthusiasm, firing a trio of artistic Don Quixotes, each one of whom was conscious of the manifold forces that were vibrating in the artistic horizon.

As every one knows, these three painters were Gabriel Dante Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt. It would be difficult to find three temperaments more varied. Perhaps it may not be wholly fanciful to say that Rossetti was the soul, Millais the body, and Holman Hunt the conscience of the movement; the first had inspiration, the second technical mastery, while the third had patience. They were, in very truth, a trinity of contrasts.

Had these young reactionists lived in Paris they would have contented themselves with frequenting the same café,

## PICTURES IN

says M. de la Sizeranne. But they were English, and therefore they formed a brotherhood. Rules were formulated—some good, some foolish; proselytes were gathered. *The Germ*, the chronicle of their faith, was issued, a name was adopted, and the mystic letters P.R.B., chosen half in fun, became first a flag of challenge, and afterwards the symbol of the English Renaissance.

It is not easy to appraise the exact influence this movement exercised in the art life of its founders. To some this foregathering of a few ardent spirits has seemed an inspiration of supreme moment. Others have regarded it as a mere incident, causing some half-dozen pictures to be painted in a certain manner, after which the entire impulse was forgotten by at least two of the triad. In the main, this divergence of outlook depends upon what the pre-Raphaelite ideal is held to signify. If it is regarded as an iron-bound code, a creed insisting on detail, pure colour, and out-of-door results—in fact, a kind of artistic mould into which each painter must be indiscriminately thrust—then certainly its influence must be narrowed to a few years of prentice discipline, when the brothers worked together, mutually reacting one upon another.

But pre-Raphaelism was more than this. Mr. F. G. Stephens, himself one of the earliest converts, describes their federation as “a League of Sincerity.” The evangel of the pre-Raphaelites was the oft-echoed cry, “Express yourself, in truth.” Their rules and early years of detailed practice were artistic leading reins, only enforced to guide them to individual realisation. It was not the work of the pre-Raphaelists to follow rules so much as to forget them.

## THE TATE GALLERY

The fact that after a few years they ceased to paint pre-Raphaelite pictures does not prove the failure of the movement. What they retained was personal intensity of expression. This is the force which constitutes their greatness. In this way they maintained the spirit of their youthful protest; in this way they overthrew tradition and effected a revolution in British art, which was even greater than they knew.

The details of Rossetti's parentage and early life are so well known I shall not here re-state them. The facts of his temperament can be briefly summarised; he was a mediæval Italian, living in London in the nineteenth century. And the expression of this Italianism was the essence of his work. Rossetti never tried to recreate the past; he lived in it. A pre-Raphaelite by election, he was also a pre-Raphaelite by temperament. Perhaps no painter has ever expressed himself more unconsciously and more unreservedly. Romance, passion, wonder, reverence, patriotism were the inheritance of his blood. His childhood was passed in a dream world in which the arts loomed large. From the very first his artistic expression was natural and spontaneous; what the poet-artist and the artist-poet gave to the world was the vibration of his own spirit.

And for this reason all training was supremely difficult to Rossetti. It may sound paradoxical but it is nevertheless true, that he was too natural an artist ever to gain complete mastery of his art. His work was too intuitive to be technically correct.

Thus it causes no surprise to hear that Rossetti was a wayward and difficult pupil. He began his systematic

## PICTURES IN

art training in 1843, at Mr. Carey's Art Academy in Bloomsbury. But neither there nor at the Academy School, to which he was admitted in 1846, does he appear to have learnt anything appreciable. Nor were matters much different when he became the pupil of Madox Brown. His master set him to paint studies of medicine bottles and pickle jars, but instead of working at these technical exercises the Italian dreamed and planned beautiful designs, and meantime covered the studio with litter and paint.

"But Gabriel has genius," was the verdict of Madox Brown.

Rossetti was always profoundly sensitive to the opinion of his friends; indeed, he was an instrument for expressing manifold impressions rather than a conscious agent. Not that his art was in any sense imitative; but his temperament was sensitively reflective, and the influence of his environment was unconsciously reproduced in his work. At the Academy Schools he had gained the friendship of Millais and Holman Hunt, and in 1848 he left Madox Brown, being unable longer to bear the bottles which "tormented his soul beyond all powers of endurance." With Hunt he took a studio at No. 7 Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square, "a dismal wilderness of dirt and gloom."

It was here that the two pre-Raphaelites painted their first pictures. Keats' famous poem, the story of Isabella and the Pot of Basil, was the subject chosen for their challenge work. It is almost unnecessary to say that Rossetti's ardour was the inspiration of the trio, while it almost equally follows that his accomplishment was the



## THE TATE GALLERY

most erratic. Upon the theme he had himself chosen he completed nothing. And Holman Hunt speaks of his "unchecked impatience" causing many interruptions in their work.

It was typical of Rossetti's character that he was indirectly, rather than directly, influenced by his association with his pre-Raphaelite brothers. Like a mirror he caught the spirit of Hunt's deep religious sentiment. He was spurred by the sight of his patient labour, while at the same time he gained much technical aid from the advice of Millais, and from the example of his brilliant facility. The influence of Madox Brown mingled with these new forces, while every motive was woven into a mystic vision of mediæval fervour by his Italian sensitiveness.

It was in this spirit that Rossetti began to work upon his "Girlhood of Mary, Virgin," early in 1849. The picture was built on a design made several months before, and a sonnet was written to illustrate the theme.

"As it were  
An angel-watered lily, that near God  
Grows and is quiet."

This supremely beautiful conception was the prelude to the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. The second scene must have already been visioned in the poet-painter's mind before he had completed the first picture, for the sonnet continues—

"Till one dawn at home  
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear  
At all, yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed,  
Because the fulness of the time was come."

In these two pictures Rossetti accomplished a supremely

## PICTURES IN

difficult thing. He gave new life to an old theme. The great Christian drama was revived by translating it into the universal drama of a woman's life. The pictures are not religious, they are human.

The Catholic ideal of Mary, Mother of God, had faded. It was no longer possible to present her wearing gorgeous raiments and soaring in the heavens amid bands of attendant cherubs, or seated enthroned in stately worship surrounded by the saints. Instead, Rossetti gives us a scene of perfect naturalness, a young girl, hovering upon the border-line of womanhood, as yet passionless, just awakened from sleep, crouches back upon her bed, half-fearing, half-expecting, "Because the fulness of the time was come."

If you wish to understand the depth, the truth, the pathetic suggestion of the scene, compare this picture with "The Annunciation," painted by Arthur Hacker, or indeed with almost any modern presentment of the scene. The contrast is too obvious to require insistence, the triviality and weakness of one realisation reveal the beauty and mystic significance of the other.

Perhaps Rossetti is the only painter who unites symbolism with reality without offence. In his later work these mystical objects tend to over-abound. But here the symbols of the lily, the briar, the palm-leaf, the dove, are introduced with a simplicity which enables us to accept their presence.

This first outgrowth of the pre-Raphaelite impulse is strongly individual and very beautiful. It is a symphony of simple lines, with its pure colour-scheme

## THE TATE GALLERY

of white, heightened by the full red of the lily embroidery. The work may not be technically perfect, but it has at the least one quality that belongs to all great art, "a lovely strangeness."

Rossetti never consciously tried to make a beautiful picture; what he strove for was to portray an idea with dramatic intensity. Beauty was superadded in the telling. This tendency, which was always strong, increased as he gained fuller technical mastery. How true this is will be seen in "The Beata Beatrix," which was not painted until 1862, and belongs to the final and most perfect stage of his artistic development.

The picture is a symbol and an idea, full of the quietness of great suggestion. Beatrice, the beloved of Dante, sits in the balcony of her father's house in Florence. We see her as she was imaged in the poet's innermost mind. She dreams the divine vision of the New Life. Each detail in the picture is a token, each colour is chosen for some deep significance. The light falls tenderly from behind, the rays shine lustrous through the heavy strands of her hair, until they radiate into an aureole of flame. In the distance are the shadowed forms of Dante and the red-robed Angel of Love. The soft cadence of the colours—purple, green, and a dull full red—mingle in a subdued melody of tones. We gaze and gaze upon the scene and remain perfectly satisfied.

Many changes marked Rossetti's progress between his early "Annunciation" and the painting of this picture. "If we would describe his growth in one short sentence,

## PICTURES IN

we may say that during these years he passed from religious mysticism to dramatic symbolism.

It is not possible to do more than briefly enumerate the events which wrought this change. Shortly after the painting of "The Annunciation," the storm of indignation against the pre-Raphaelites gathered and fell. The significance of the letters P.R.B. was fathomed, England rose in protest, and the defence of Raphael and tradition became a kind of holy Crusade. This event intimately affected Rossetti. His picture was left unsold, and half in fun, half in bitterness, he dubbed it "the blessed white eyesore." Once in disgust he determined to accept a post as a telegraph clerk at one of the great railways. Success and sympathy were essential to Rossetti. He became restless, maybe he wearied of the old restraints, but in 1851 he left the studio at Newman Street and thus passed from the constraining religious atmosphere, which resulted from his companionship with Holman Hunt. In the same year Mr. Ruskin's famous letters were sent to the *Times*, and the pre-Raphaelite battle was won. But the trio of brothers were now seeking for individual development in diverse paths. *The Germ* was already dead; in 1853 Holman Hunt sailed for Palestine in pursuit of truth, while Millais was welcomed into the safe fold of the Academy and became A.R.A. "So now the whole Round Table is dissolved," was Rossetti's comment upon these events.

Meanwhile new influences had played upon the poet's spirit, and he had already painted several pictures in a new mood of strong dramatic passion. A visit to Paris and the Low Countries, the awakening of Robert Browning's



## THE TATE GALLERY

poetry, the strong spell of Miss Siddall's beauty, the friendship and generosity of Mr. Ruskin, such were the strongest factors which now moulded Rossetti's mode of expression.

In the next six years he painted a series of historic pictures all strongly dramatic and symbolical. "The Laboratory," a first work in water-colour, was the herald of these pictures of concentrated passion. The scene is founded upon Browning's poem of the same name. In it we see a jealous woman seeking from the apothecary "the drop" with which to poison her rival.

"Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose,  
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:  
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee—  
If it hurts her; beside, can it ever hurt me?"

Perfectly the scene is realised. The design, the strong brilliant colours, the gestures of the man and of the woman, every detail introduced combines to accentuate the fury of this voluptuous and jealous woman.

Other pictures followed this work. The pen-drawing of "Hesterna Rosa," the first design of "How They Met Themselves," the brilliant "Lucrezia Borgia," "Dante drawing an Angel in Memory of Beatrice," "Beatrice at the Wedding Feast denying her salutation to Dante," the water-colour of "Dante's Dream," and the exquisite study of "Paolo and Francesca," are a few examples of these conceptions of intensely realised human emotion. Much might be written of these pictures. Again and again in the work we trace the influence of Madox Brown. The stern simplicity of the early sacred studies has passed, but these later designs still retain the pre-Raphaelite intensity of



## PICTURES IN

expression. Every attitude speaks; every colour chosen, every detail introduced, assists the strong dramatic effect.

A growing delight in detailed symbolism may be detected in many of these designs. This tendency was greatly increased about 1857. At that time Rossetti was brought into touch with the Oxford æsthetic movement by his friendship with William Morris, Burne-Jones, and Swinburne. He became the arch-apostle of these young enthusiasts, and almost at once his art re-echoed their beliefs. The pictures of this period, such as "The Blue Closet," "The Wedding of St. George," and the many illustrations to the Arthurian romantic cycle, are decorative rather than pictorial in their effect. The designs are overcrowded, and in spite of the beauty of the realisation, our eye wearies of unneeded figures and multiplicity of detail, while our literary intelligence is oppressed with the meaning of the numberless symbols.

But Rossetti did not remain in these by-paths of mediævalism. His versatile genius found many varied channels of expression. The impressive drawing of "Found," executed in 1853, retains a strong pre-Raphaelite accent. It is full of memories of Madox Brown. Again, the scene of "Dr. Johnson at the Mitre" is an inimitable study of humour, rendered with perfect directness; yet the scene was conceived in 1860, the time when his spirit was steeped in decorative convention.

In 1860 Rossetti married Miss Siddall, and about this time he may be said to have reached his final goal of full development. He had now overmastered the greatest



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ROSA TRIPLEX.  
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.





## THE TATE GALLERY

of his technical deficiencies, while his colour, always good, was in these last years supremely great.

Almost all the pictures of this period are creative impersonations of beautiful women. In the majority the literary intention is still symbolical, as in the case of "The Beata Beatrix," but the symbols are not super-added details; they are part of the design, and aid its beauty.

A few of the studies are conceptions of pure beauty, with no mystical meaning. Such a work is the sumptuous portrait of Mrs. Morris, with its rich glow of Venetian tones. A second example is the red chalk drawing of "Rosa Triplex," a threefold rendering of one exquisite form. In this drawing Rossetti was a simple devotee of Beauty. Five times he repeated the theme, enamoured with the charm of the design. The drawing of the Tate Gallery was made in 1867, from Miss Alice Wilding.

Throughout his life Rossetti's powers were stimulated by the women he painted. It has often been said that his personations are unreal. This is not so; they were the living reflections of the women he knew most truly. His sister Christina was a perfect Virgin, and her quiet and distinctive charm influenced his first years of religious symbolism. Miss Siddall, for ten years his comrade and pupil, and for two brief years his wife, was the supreme inspiration of his work until her death in 1862. We see her first in the picture of "Dante on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death," while the "Beata Beatrix" is a last profoundly touching memory, painted immediately after the tragedy of her loss. Miss Ruth Herbert, Miss Alice

## THE TATE GALLERY

Wilding, and Mrs. William Morris were the models for his later pictures. The rare beauty of Mrs. Morris quickened Rossetti's fullest powers. Hers was a poet's ideal face, alluring, illusive, and wholly felicitous. Again and again Rossetti painted her. In "Mariana," in "Proserpine," in "Venus Astarte," in "La Donna della Finestra," in "Pandora," in "The Day Dream," he was spurred by the beauty of her suggestiveness.

In the space of these few pages it has not been practicable to deal adequately with a genius so complex, so varied, and so rare as that which animated Rossetti. No detailed chronicle of his life has been possible, the music of his verses has been passed over in silence, while much of his work has perforce remained unnoticed. And yet in Rossetti's case all omission is specially difficult, for each event left its indelible imprint upon his life, to be afterwards repeated in his work.

"What of the end? These beat their wings at will,  
The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill,—  
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.  
Ay, clench the casket now! Whither they go  
Thou may'st not dare to think: nor canst thou know  
If hope still pent there be alive or dead."

—Rossetti's Sonnet "Pandora."



## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

SIR JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS (1829-1896)



## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: SIR JOHN EVERETT

MILLAIS (1829-1896)



IF Gabriel Rossetti was the soul of the pre-Raphaelite movement, Sir John Millais was its animating life. His clear common-sense, his directness of vision, the strong virility of the man and of his art, accomplished what neither of his *confrères* could have effected alone. While Rossetti roamed in the by-paths of mediæval fancy, while Holman Hunt toiled up the hills of undeviating effort, Millais walked swiftly along a straight pleasant road, fascinating the cultured with his manner of painting, and at the same time pleasing the populace with his subjects.

*Veni, vidi, vici!* The sentence rises unbidden to our memory when we think of Sir John Millais. His career in art was a triumphant march of great accomplishment.

His talent and his happy self-confidence were both of early growth. As a child of six his power in drawing was already remarkable, and a story is told of a wager lost by a French officer, who was unable to credit his premature talent. Before he was nine the brilliant child was taken by his parents to London. His drawings were

## PICTURES IN

shown to Sir Martin Shee, the President of the Royal Academy.

"You had better make your son a chimney-sweep than an artist," was the advice of the old President before the portfolio was opened.

He looked at the sketches.

"Madam, Nature has made your son an artist; it is your duty to bring him up to art."

This successful prelude indicated the movement that would follow. Through his probationary course with Mr. Sass, and during his years of training in the schools of the Academy, the triumph continued. Every prize, every medal was gained by the bright boy-student, whose personality was as remarkable as his talent. He was always eager to aid his friends; indeed, his spirit was on fire with enthusiasm to seize whatever he saw was good. Rossetti once said that "His face shone like an angel"; while Holman Hunt writes in his reminiscences of their student days, "Millais and I used to talk about painting. His power dazzled me."

At seventeen his first picture, "Pizarro seizing the Inca of Peru," was hung at the Academy, and this ambitious work was appraised by a French critic "as one of the two best historical pictures of the year." "The Tribe of Benjamin seizing the Daughters of Shiloh," "Elgiva seized by Order of Archbishop Odo," and a large and powerful scriptural design of "The Widow Offering her Mite," which was sent to the Westminster Hall Competition of 1847, were the product of his eighteenth year.

As the titles of these compositions indicate, Millais at

## THE TATE GALLERY

first worked in the prescribed path of traditional art. There is nothing in these scenes of many figures, except the vigour of their execution, to separate them from the usual academic output of Victorian historic presentment.

Perhaps nothing illustrates so forcibly the extreme robustness which at all times characterised Millais, both as a man and as a painter, as the remarkable swiftness with which he was able to revolutionise his manner of expression. If the canvas of "Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru" were taken from its resting-place at South Kensington Museum and placed in the Liverpool Art Gallery, in juxtaposition with his first pre-Raphaelite conception of "Lorenzo and Isabella," the primal impression left upon the mind would be supreme wonderment that both pictures had been painted by the same youth within a term of three years. In nothing are they united except in their amazing strength.

It can never be truly said that there was anything tentative in the work of Millais. Even his prentice pictures are perfectly assured in execution; there is no sign of hesitation in the manner in which they are painted.

Millais was a born fighter, and probably it was this instinct which caused him to join with Rossetti and Holman Hunt in the pre-Raphaelite revival. It will be remembered that Rossetti never accomplished his picture upon the subject of "Isabella," the theme chosen by the trio for their first essay in vindication of the Primitives. This, as we have seen, was typical of the poet. It was equally characteristic of Millais, that while Rossetti talked and



## PICTURES IN

Holman Hunt diligently studied details, he painted his "Lorenzo and Isabella."

Holman Hunt has called this work "the most wonderful painting that any youth still under twenty years of age ever did in the world," and probably this estimate is little exaggerated.

It would be futile to dogmatise with regard to the exact inspiration that Millais gained from the pre-Raphaelite federation. That his power was stimulated, nay, rather deepened, by the subtle and poetic beauty of Rossetti and the strong Christian sincerity of Holman Hunt is abundantly evident. Think of the picture of "Christ in the House of his Parents," which was painted in 1850, the second year of the pre-Raphaelite protest. In this work every attitude is considered, every detail is a symbol introduced to help the story. The spirit of Rossetti seems to hover in the conception, while the skilful execution is from the hand of Millais.

This imaginative symbolism appears to some extent in many of the painter's early pictures. We see it in "The Bridesmaid," in "Ferdinand Lured by Ariel," in "Mariana in the Moated Grange," in "Ophelia," and in other works. It reappears in "The Vale of Rest," which was painted after the first strictness of the pre-Raphaelite motives had been loosened. While finally it may be traced, in a new form of sentimentalised degeneracy, in "St. Stephen," "A Disciple," and "The Forerunner," the last pictures that he painted.

The wave of enthusiasm for Raphael and tradition that flooded England in 1850 stemmed for a time the

## THE TATE GALLERY

stream of the young pre-Raphaelite's popularity. But the cloud did not remain, and before 1853 the sun of his prosperity was again shining.

Two pictures compassed this change, "The Huguenot" of 1852, and the still more popular work, "The Order of Release," painted in 1855. These pictures are typical of the large group of everyday scenes of sentiment which have endeared Millais to the populace of England.

One further point must be noted about these genre studies; they are pre-Raphaelite in the detailed reality of their rendering, but they are without the pre-Raphaelite sentiment. Look at "The Order of Release" and you will see that intensity of realisation—the essential spirit of pre-Raphaelism, is entirely absent. The attitudes, the gestures and the expressions are commonplace; there is no depth of meaning either in the colour or in the details of the picture.

At all times Millais chose his subjects solely for the sake of painting them. It is this characteristic which causes M. de la Sizeranne to say that "he is the least English of the artists of his country." And it is surely in this fact we find the explanation of the great variety in his pictures. Millais had no desire to teach; there was no special meaning he wished his pictures to express. He was not overburdened with imagination or ideals of beauty, and as soon as the pre-Raphaelite battle was gained he had no creed to justify. I do not even think he was much burdened with the desire to please his public. He merely wished to paint. To him art was so natural, so much a matter of course, that it was but a

## PICTURES IN

step to descend to the commonplace. This fact was Millais' strength, but it was also his weakness.

The "Ophelia" was painted in the same year as "The Order of Release." The canvases hang almost side by side in the Tate Gallery, and again we note the great difference in the two pictures.

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples . . .  
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;  
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up;  
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element: but long it could not be  
Till that her garments heavy with their drink,  
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death."

What can we say, except that this wondrous imagery is exquisitely rendered? The painting is a rare union of reality and imagination. Each petal, each leaf, each tiny rush and bough of willow is painted with loving carefulness. And all the tints are gladdened by the clear strong sunlight.

"Ophelia" is a portrait of Miss Siddall; and her exceptional beauty is perfectly suggested. The dull flame of her copper hair, the bright clear complexion, the strange winning sweetness are faithfully pictured. "Wonderfully like her," was the verdict of the friends who knew her.





OPHELIA.  
SIR J. E. MILLAIS, P.R.A.

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## THE TATE GALLERY

The scene is an actual transcript from the Ewell, near Kingston, where Millais and Holman Hunt went during the summer of 1851, to paint the landscapes to their pictures.

"It is not given to every man—not, indeed, to any—to succeed whenever and however he tries. The best painter that ever lived never entirely succeeded more than four or five times; that is to say, no artist ever painted more than four or five masterpieces." These are the painter's own words, written in his *Thoughts on Our Art of To-day*. No one was more conscious than Millais of the disproportion in his achievements. In the same essay he stated, "I confess I should not grieve if half my works were to go to the bottom of the Atlantic—if I might choose the half to go." Mr. Spielmann, in his excellent appreciation of the painter, *Millais and His Works*, relates the incident which first called forth this remark. It was in 1886, the year in which an exhibition of his pictures was held at the Grosvenor Gallery. Millais went to the house of Lord Leighton straight from gazing upon his own handiwork. "'Quick!' he exclaimed, in an exhausted tone, 'give me some champagne—I'm quite ill.' Then, after a draught, he added: 'I've been seeing all my old work!—all my past misdeeds have been rising up against me! Oh, the *vulgarity* of some of them, my dear fellow! The *vulgarity*! But some fine things, mind you!'"

Among these *fine things* "Ophelia" and "The Vale of Rest" may unhesitatingly be placed. They are among the master works which all would accord to the painter's name.

## PICTURES IN

"The Vale of Rest" was not completed until 1859, a time when the "Portrait of Mr. Gladstone," "Autumn Leaves," and "The Blind Girl" had already been added to his pre-Raphaelite triumphs.

Millais was now passing through a transitional period. The pre-Raphaelite battle had become a victory; there was no longer need for a militant expression of his principles. He lessened his insistence upon detail, his manipulation became freer, and his realism less literal. And yet this picture, which marks his passage from the controlling reins that had hitherto directed his brush, is the most truly pre-Raphaelite of his works. In it we see the very spirit of the English renaissance.

It is not a picture that can be described in words. Two nuns—the critics called them ugly—are in a convent graveyard, one is labouring heavily, her muscles strain as she lifts her spade, weighted with heavy earth, from the grave which she is digging. An elder sister sits upon a slab of stone that has been removed from the grave head. The time is evening; the sky is fused with the tints of sunset; but amid the glory is a coffin-shaped cloud, the omen of death.

This bald description can convey no idea of the symphony of the colours, the agreement of the design, the fine quality of the paint; still less can it give the beauty of the thought. The scene is one of suggestive symbolism. From the contrast of the perfect quiet of that sunlit garden, side by side with the presage of death, we realise something of the inevitableness of life.

This was the painter's favourite picture. The subject



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THE VALE OF REST.  
SIR J. E. MILLAIS, P.R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

was first imaged in his memory from a chance view of a nun digging a grave in a French convent, but the actual scene was painted from an old churchyard at Kinnoull in Perthshire.

We have no need to follow step by step the artistic path which Millais now pursued. His pictures in the Tate Gallery will furnish us with the record. Much has been written upon the apostasy of the painter, who travelled in twenty-five years from "The Vale of Rest" to "Bubbles." Many have found an explanation of this change in the fact that the letters P.R.B. were exchanged first to A.R.A. in 1853, and ten years later to R.A. It has been said that the poetry and sentiment of his early work was a reflected inspiration, drawn from Rossetti and Holman Hunt. That Millais was influenced by the pre-Raphaelite association is undoubted, but this explanation cannot be entirely accepted. "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "The Enemy Sowing Tares," both painted after 1862, and the much later "Victory, O Lord," of 1871, are works of suggestion and imagination. Certainly in his later years Millais did paint many popular pictures. But this was not a change; it was simply an increase of the tendency which caused him to select a subject for its paintable possibilities alone. Any common daily incident suggested a picture. His own children were the models for the majority of the child-scenes that are known in every home of England.

The essential change between the painter's earlier and later work is a technical one. Compare the manner of painting in "The North-West Passage" of 1874 with the



## PICTURES IN

"Ophelia" or even with "The Vale of Rest," and this difference will at once be manifest. All trace of the old pre-Raphaelite brush-work has disappeared, no longer are the details accentuated; instead, every incident is subordinated to the general effect.

"The North-West Passage" is one of the masterpieces of these late years. The rendering is magnificent. All the accessories are faithfully painted, yet the picture is not a record, but a perfect impression of the scene. We may not care for the subject, but this is forgotten, as we delight in the actual quality of the paint and in the rare beauty of the colour.

Millais always had the power of telling a story dramatically. It is true that his drama is not profound, nor is it very original, but the historic rendering lends an obvious interest to many of his pictures. We see this in "The North-West Passage"; we see it again in "The Boyhood of Raleigh." In this latter picture the interest of the scene is at once centralised in the intent faces of the two boys, as they sit crouched upon the quay listening to the recital of a Genoese sailor. The boys are portraits of his sons, and Millais has interpreted their wrapt eagerness with fine power.

This instinct for dramatic situations was entirely natural to Millais. Unfortunately his drama often descends to melodrama. We gain the first hint of this romantic over-emphasis in "The Proscribed Royalist," an early picture painted in 1853. It would be easy to multiply instances from many of the painter's romantic scenes. It is this theatrical unreality which impairs the conception in

## THE TATE GALLERY

"Mercy St. Bartholomew's Day." We see the same weakness in the later work of "Speak, Speak," and the same want of restrained simplicity may be detected in the finer picture of "The Knight Errant."

Millais was one of the few painters who never acquired a distinctive manner, and the most remarkable characteristic of any collection of his pictures is their variety. The intention of his art was never sufficiently complex to become specialised. In the Tate Gallery we see him as a realist and as an impressionist, as a symbolist and as a storyteller, as a painter of exquisite dreams and as a painter of trivial facts. In one picture he delights the poet, in another he speaks to the philistine. Nor do these pictures in the National Collection exhaust the manifold capacity of his expression. He was a great portraitist, he was also a landscape painter, and above this he worked with consummate ability in black and white. His portrait studies are perhaps his finest work; they reveal his marvellous dexterity as a workman. Think of such pictures as "Fresh Eggs," a simple presentment of his daughter dressed in a Pompadour costume, or of the well-known "Yeoman of the Guard," or again of the brilliant "Souvenir of Velasquez," his diploma picture of 1868. In these works we unreservedly admire the quality of the paint, the strong vigour of the brush-work, and the fresh charm of the colour. Millais had fine power in depicting natural scenes. His landscapes are transcripts, cut like living blocks from Nature. We find again the poetry of his early work in such scenes as "Chill October" and "An Old Garden." And lastly, his book illustrations in black and white must not be

## THE TATE GALLERY

overlooked in estimating the greatness of his achievement.

Had Millais accomplished less he would probably never have failed. We may wish that certain pictures had remained unpainted; we may regret that his rare technical genius in some cases appears to have been wasted. But we must remember that, even were it possible to have changed these things, we should probably have lost more than we gained. No one can give to the world except from the outgrowth of his own character. And in his art Millais was essentially himself, a painter rather than an artist, a brilliant manipulator, but not a poet.

CHAPTER VIII  
THE PRE-RAPHAELITE DISCIPLES





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PRE-RAPHAELITE DISCIPLES



HOLMAN HUNT, the third member of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, is unrepresented in the Tate Gallery. This omission cannot be too deeply deplored. Rossetti once said of his work "that the solemn human soul seemed to vibrate through it like a bell." And this judgment is true. Holman Hunt was something more than the conscience of pre-Raphaelism; he was the reanimated spirit of mediæval Christianity working in the nineteenth century. The aim of his art was to re-clothe the life of Christ in actual verity. He sought to reproduce the eternal significance of the Christian drama by scientific fidelity, and even exaggeration of detail; giving beauty and deeper meaning to his work by a wealth of imaginative symbolism. Whether such an aim could ever be accomplished by such means we need not ask; nor need we pause to question whether this multitude of symbol and elaborate detail does not weary, instead of charm, the artistic reason, and thus defeat its own purpose. Let this be as it may, the work of Holman Hunt typifies a radical and distinctive phase in the development of British art; and for this reason alone, even if for

## PICTURES IN

no other, our National Collection must remain incomplete while his work is absent.

To some small extent this historical void is filled by the work of Thomas Seddon (1821-1857), the disciple of Holman Hunt, he echoes in landscape the spirit of his master. "Jerusalem, and the Valley of Jehoshaphat" is an effort to reproduce with absolute exactitude the truth of the scene represented. It is, says Mr. Ruskin, "a truly historic landscape, uniting perfect artistical skill with topographical accuracy." The primal object is to place the spectator, as far as art can do, in the scene represented, and to give him the perfect sensation of its reality, wholly unmodified by the artist's execution."

Seddon travelled with Holman Hunt to the East in 1853. Five months of incessant toil were devoted to the execution of the picture; and during the couple of years he was away, only two works were completed, the "Jerusalem," and a scene of the "Pyramids of Ghizeh." In a letter sent from Jerusalem the painter writes: "After visiting every part of the city and surrounding country to determine what I would do, I have encamped upon the hill to the south, looking up the valley of Jehoshaphat; I have sketched the view which I see from the opening of my tent. I am painting from one hundred yards higher up, where I see more of the valley, with the Tombs of the Kings and Gethsemane. I get up before five, breakfast, and begin soon after six. I come in at twelve and dine, and sleep for an hour; and then, about two, paint till sunset."

The picture breathes the spirit of desolation—that strange beauty, half alluring, half repelling, of an Eastern scene,

## THE TATE GALLERY

where all landscape seems reduced to one plane, and all colour to one tone, until every incident of the scene blends, buildings, rocks, vegetation, landscape, all united in weird fascination. The picture is a literal transcript of the scene, and yet it is far more than a topographical map of Jerusalem. We realise something of the deep spirit of loving piety in which it was painted; we feel instinctively that the artist's mood was in complete unison with his subject. Thus, though the scene is unchanged by pictorial embellishment, it is infused with the charm of inspiration. In the true colour of its blue-purple shadows, in its realisation of light, in its truth of both sentiment and detail, the picture is beautiful. We do not weary of gazing at it, for it has the uncommon charm of negative perfection.

The disciple of Rossetti, and to a certain extent his successor, was Sir Edward Burne-Jones. "His art has grown up from the seed sown by Madox Brown, on the stem cultivated by Rossetti," writes M. de la Sizeranne. It was Rossetti's woodcut design of "Elfen Mere" that first inflamed the latent enthusiasm that dwelt in the spirit of Burne-Jones. At the time he was an Oxford undergraduate, destined for the Church. With the devotion of a pilgrim, worshipping at the shrine of his chosen saint, he sought Rossetti, and asked his advice. The result was that he forsook Oxford and the Church, and became the pupil of the pre-Raphaelite symbolist.

In this brief space it is not possible to follow the effect of this discipleship. Burne-Jones gained much of Rossetti's Italian spirit, but to this mediævalism was added a yearning weariness, born of modern thought.

## PICTURES IN

The difference between the attitude of the two artists was that one adopted the manner of expression that was natural to the other. The pupil re-expressed the artistic predisposition of the master, with an added coldness, a fulness of pure thought, that was his own; the result of his work being the outcome of study rather than of spontaneous fancy.

And herein rests the secret of decorative purity that animates the art Burne-Jones has created. In his work we see the intensity of attitude and gesture, the depths of purpose, the full suggestive symbolism, the poetic intention, the strange loveliness of pre-Raphaelism, translated into a new language of restrained and sombre pensiveness.

"King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid" is a perfect design of pure decorative beauty. The old legend is infused with a new spirit, wherein Italian forms mingle strangely with modern sadness.

"For thou, quoth he, shall be my wife,  
And honoured for my queen."

There is nothing of the exultant lover in the conception of the king; while the beggar-maid might be a virgin who had stepped from a canvas of the Primitives. The low-keyed colour-scheme harmonises with the idea, the strange height of the figures with their strained unrestful attitudes, even the laboured handling and the curious quality of paint seem to emphasise the intention of the work. Every detail of the scene appears inevitable—we wish to alter nothing; the picture brings us a hovering sense of wistful sadness akin to the painter's mood.



## THE TATE GALLERY

R. B. Martineau (1826-1869), Henry Wallis (born 1830), and J. M. Inchbold (1830-1888), worked directly under the pre-Raphaelite influence. Each painter has a picture in the National Collection. Martineau was the pupil of Holman Hunt. "He never became a facile executant, but from the very first he produced admirable pictures," was the verdict of his master. His small study, "The Last Day in the Old Home," is an example of the patient and conscientious sincerity of his art. Every detail is rendered with almost painful accuracy. It is said that Martineau devoted ten years to painting this picture. "The Death of Chatterton," by Henry Wallis, is a dramatic rendering of a tragic theme that has gained much popularity. The work is pre-Raphaelite in manner rather than in spirit. The exact reverse may be said about the moorland landscape of J. W. Inchbold. It is a view on Dartmoor, carefully painted, and made beautiful with harmonious colour. Ruskin, in his *Academy Notes*, praises "the exquisite finish of the lichenous rock painting."

This brief summary does not exhaust the painters who were conscious of the reviving impulse of the English renaissance. The sincerity, the simplicity, the depth of intention, and the personality, realised in the work of Madox Brown and the triad of pre-Raphaelite brothers yielded abundant fruitage. It was these qualities which united in remoulding British art. This influence cannot be measured nor arbitrarily appraised. The pre-Raphaelite inspiration was translated by many workers into new forms of personal expression. Yet recollections of the old distinctive style still linger in British art. A few painters

## THE TATE GALLERY

to-day continue to work in the pre-Raphaelite manner, reproducing not only the spirit of pre-Raphaelism, but its actual form. "My Lady's Garden," by J. Young Hunter, and "A Golden Thread" and "The Story of Ruth," the decorative panels of Mr. Strudwick and Mr. Rooke, are modern pre-Raphaelesque survivals.

## CHAPTER IX

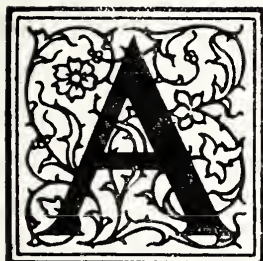
IMAGINATIVE ART: GEORGE FREDERICK  
WATTS (1817-1904)



## CHAPTER IX

### IMAGINATIVE ART: GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS

(1817-1904)



ART, losing its great mission, being no longer employed in the service of the State or of religion, is in danger of losing its character as a great intellectual utterance."

"I paint ideas, not objects. I paint first of all because I have something to say."

"My intention has not been so much to paint pictures that will charm the eye as to suggest great thoughts that will appeal to the imagination and the heart, and kindle all that is best and noblest in humanity."

"I even think that in the future, and in stronger hands than mine, Art may yet speak, as great as poetry itself, with the solemn and majestic ring in which the Hebrew prophets spoke to the Jews of old, demanding noble aspirations."

I have singled out these four utterances of the painter, who was also a prophet, because they illuminate his inmost character. No words of mine could mirror so clearly the spirit of the man we have known as G. F. Watts. The sound of heroic resolve rings in the cries, eighty-seven



## PICTURES IN

years consecrated to one purpose, that "Art may yet speak, may yet demand noble aspirations."

We must not forget that in his essential temperament Watts belonged to the generation that has passed—passed as completely as if hundreds and not units represented the years that separate it from the present. The Victorian age was self-conscious and self-important. Many of its greatest and most typical figures show a curious interblending of sacrifice and high resolve, touched with self-consciousness. It is a trait very difficult to describe, but any one who has read Mr. Morley's *Life of Gladstone* will understand what it was—a union of self-importance with high purpose and profound humility. Perhaps we may best define it as a deep sense of a mission, which made a man self-conscious through his work rather than through himself. A character sublimely grand, and at the same time deficient in humour.

It was something of this spirit, mellowed by an added artistic sense and a deep comprehension of the power of beauty, that fired the imagination of Watts. The young painter roamed in the Greek corridors of the British Museum, and gazed upon the Elgin Marbles, the while he dreamed of a great renaissance in the art of the world. It was no personal arrogance that made this boy determine he would devote his life to painting great art. He was the instrument; it was his message that was great.

It is not surprising to learn that Watts gained nothing from the training of the Academy. He worked for one month in the Schools, and then he returned to the Elgin Marbles to learn how "to produce great works."

## THE TATE GALLERY

A portrait is still in existence, painted by Watts himself, in which we see him as he was in those student days. The face is long, oval and sensitive, haloed with a thick mass of falling dark hair; the features are finely chiselled, the mouth large and fully curved, the eyes clear, intent, and searching. The low collar and loose tie leave the throat quite free; the coat is rough, and it is carelessly worn. It is the likeness of a poet; it bears a strange, yet striking similarity to the face of Shelley. The expression is that of an ardent disciple, and the head would serve for the model of a young David.

The Westminster Cartoon Competition of 1843 first gave the painter the opportunity for which he yearned. This event, of weighty import to all British artists, to Watts was something more. It was a public call to a great duty. Ford Madox Brown, Alfred Stevens, and Millais were among the competitors. Each painter was intimately conscious of the dignity of his work, each was supremely earnest, each was destined to work for the emancipation of British Art. Yet the spirit of the prophet-painter was apart from theirs. They worked for art; he that art might teach. "It might be done, and England should do it." This motto, chosen by Millais to illustrate his picture, "The North-West Passage," reflects the spirit in which Watts painted his cartoon of "Caractacus led captive through the streets of Rome."

Art was to be saved. Once more it was to glorify humanity; nay, it was to do more than it had yet accomplished, it was to be the evangel of a new age of righteousness. This was the first tremendous thought that fired

## PICTURES IN

the devotion dwelling in the mind of Watts. The second thought was hardly less important—England was to achieve this work. Patriotism meant to Watts something profoundly great. His art and England were the two mistresses to whom he dedicated his life. For it was in truth a dedication. No painter, in the simpler ages that are past, partaking of the Eucharist before he essayed to paint, was ever more conscious of the greatness and solemnity of his work.

There is something almost staggering in the thought of what this young painter felt himself called upon to accomplish. No thought of gaining personal greatness participated in his vision, and because of this abnegation, an inspiration arose which, in some measure at any rate, caused the impossible to be achieved.

It is not necessary to follow step by step the course by which Watts prepared himself for his labour. The "Caractacus" cartoon of 1843 obtained a prize. Four years were spent in Italy in study and in continued meditation. In 1847 the young painter returned to England in order to take part in a new Westminster competition. Once again he gained a prize, this time for a cartoon of "Alfred inciting the Saxons to resist the Danes."

The next twelve years were dedicated to national decorations in heroic fresco. It was a period of disappointment that resulted, to a great extent, in failure. Fresco painting and the English climate are not in unison. And the fresco of "St. George and the Dragon," painted in the upper Waiting Hall of Westminster Palace, at the cost of five years' labour, quickly faded.

## THE TATE GALLERY

An event of this period sheds such illumination upon the character of the prophet-painter that it may not be lightly passed over. About this time Watts applied to the Directors of the London and North-Western Railway for permission to decorate their station with a series of compositions which would interpret the history of the Cosmos. Now, unless we realise that to Watts there was no incongruity in the idea of uniting the Cosmos with Euston Station, we cannot understand the combined simplicity and greatness of his spirit. Mr. Chesterton speaks of this incident as "a splendid and truly religious imagination." And Mr. Chesterton is right. Yet, probably, Watts was the only painter of the age to whom such a thought would have been at once beautiful and perfectly possible.

This free gift was refused, and the painter's hope of decorating the everyday public buildings of England for her people had to be renounced. Instead he painted his great fresco of "Justice" for the Benchers at Lincoln's Inn. But the prophet's message was for the people, and a new scheme of artistic redemption was formulated. With sublime enthusiasm Watts determined to paint a mighty series of pictures, to be given to the nation as the fruitage of his life. He would tell the story of the Cosmos, he would teach great facts of Love and Life and Death; while, in addition, he would paint a group of portraits of the renowned and worthy men of his time.

We learn that even as a boy he dreamed of a mighty temple or palace of light, with corridors and stately halls all filled with paintings, that should teach men the wonders and mysteries of truth.



## PICTURES IN

It was in this spirit that Watts began to paint the series of pictures, which were to interpret his philosophy of life.

The prelude to this work was the picture of "Life's Illusions," which has recently been added to the Tate Gallery. The composition was painted as early as 1850, at the time when the Lincoln's Inn fresco was being executed. From Watts himself we learn that the intention is allegorical. The design typifies the march of human life. "Fair visions of beauty, the abstract embodiments of divers forms of Hope and Ambition, hover high in the air above the gulf which stands as the goal of all men's lives. At their feet lie the shattered symbols of human greatness and power, and upon the narrow space of earth that overhangs the deep abyss are figured the brighter forms of illusions that endure through every changing fashion of the world."

Now in this work the painting is supremely beautiful, but the symbolism is too obvious. We know that all men are pursuing bubbles, that all are riding into unknown space. These are the commonplaces of knowledge. Thus, in spite of the full beauty of the flowing lines, the glory of tone, and the perfect rendering of the nude figure, the picture leaves us intellectually unmoved.

To-day it is only possible for the artist to use symbolism in two ways. The symbols may be introduced as part of the design, in the manner Rossetti or Burne-Jones handled them. In this case they are purely pictorial, and their actual meaning matters little. But when the symbolism becomes didactic and is used to enforce a meaning, then the suggested idea must convey to the mind a fresh truth,



## THE TATE GALLERY

or rather a truth revived so that we comprehend its significance anew. If this is not done we would prefer the picture without its symbolical lesson.

But it is exactly this that Watts has accomplished in the greatest of his subsequent work. His pictures tell of Death and Life and Love, the truths which remain eternal through every age. And these old facts spring forth from his hand re-clothed with new ideas. We realise, as we gaze upon his work, that mythological painting can still be alive. Watts painted a Death benignant and strong, welcomed instead of hated, the friend of little children. His Love is triumphant and protecting, the guide, the sustainer, the recompense of Life. For it is Life that is weak and tremulous, unable to walk except for the firm hand of Love. And yet Love is less beneficent than Death. These are the primal truths that Watts has taught us.

His wondrous picture of "Death Crowning Innocence" might readily be mistaken for a modern rendering of the Madonna with her Child. The perfect tenderness of the winged figure breathes a divine motherhood. Nor is Death compassionate only to the innocent. In "The Court of Death" the universal Queen has cast aside her shroud, she sits enthroned, a woman benign and restful. On either side she is guarded by the powers of Silence and Mystery, while her throne is reared on the ruins of Earthly Pride. A warrior, in the strength of manhood; a woman, beautiful but weary, seek her eternal rest; a young child gambols fearlessly in the long folds of her shroud; a new-born babe is nestled in her arms. For Life cometh from Death the Consoler.

## PICTURES IN

Again, and yet again, these new truths are pictured. We read the same unbroken parable in "Love and Life" and "Love and Death," the companion pictures in which the painter spoke his message, perhaps, most clearly.

Life in uttermost surrender trusts herself to Love. Her frail, uncertain form is screened with his embracing wings. In pleading wistfulness she gazes upwards; she rests solely upon his tenderness and strength. Slowly Love leads her onwards, step by step they climb the difficult ascent. Flowers spring to mark Love's foot-prints, for Love forms the beauty of Life. And yet, Love is shadowed by immortal Death. In the second picture Love has become a beautiful child; passionately he protests, as with his tiny arm he strives to force back the strong, shrouded figure he cannot comprehend. Still he struggles to guard dear Life; but with calm compassion Death passes within. Life cannot live except for Love, but Death is the consummation of Life.

Watts realised the beauty of Life and Love and Death; he was equally conscious of the ugliness of sin. Jonah the prophet, with his expressive posture, and eyes aflame with frenzied fire, still re-echoes the cry, "Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." "Mammon" is a magnificent sermon protesting against the rottenness of modern commercialism. The message of "The Minotaur" is equally clear. "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" illustrates the folly of cumulative riches, and the same lesson is again enforced in the supremely fine conception, "For he had great possessions."



*Photo F. HOLLYER.*

LOVE AND LIFE.

G. F. WATTS, R.A.



## THE TATE GALLERY

This, then, is what the prophet-painter has achieved—he has infused new meaning into mythological art. But it is not sufficient that symbolic painting shall suggest new thoughts, for a work of art must charm the eye as well as satisfy the mind. A picture must be pictorial, and to accomplish this the symbolism that teaches must form part of the design of the picture; every detail must harmonise as truly as if the symbolism were used for the purpose of decoration alone.

And once more we can say that Watts has accomplished this primal necessity of a work of art in the greatest of his pictures. Rossetti employed symbolism to assist the disposition of his lines and to aid his scheme of colour. Watts reversed the order, and used his lines and colours to accentuate the meaning of his symbols. The result is different, but in each case there is unison. Both painters retain beauty, for each preserves harmony. One subordinated his symbols while the other subordinated his paint.

Example after example might be cited; they may be gleaned from almost every picture of the painter. The fold of a drapery, the strong curve of a line, the gleam of a colour will reveal the inmost meaning of the work. Think for a moment of the intermingling blue and limpid green that charms us in the lovely presentment of "Hope." We see these blended tints again in "The Dweller in the Innermost," that supreme realisation of conscience. How wondrous is the flash of illusive green that springs from the searching eyes? This same atmosphere of starlight blue and green surrounds the figure of "The All-Pervading." It shadows Death as she crowns Innocence with Peace.



## PICTURES IN

Surely these dual tints breathe forth the very essence of the idea that has inspired the work? Then again, there is the strong red of Faith's flaming figure, with its suggestion of fulness and power. This is the colour chosen for the widespread robe which enfolds the "Spirit of the Churches," wherein are sheltered the infant creeds of the world. The very flesh-tints Watts used for his personations bespeak the inward meaning of their character. Contrast the strong dull earth-red of Mammon's flesh with the cold, shadowy greys of beautiful sorrowing Psyche, or with the tender cream-tints of Love's trembling body, or again with the warm living flesh of Eve. Every tone of colour has its vital significance, its own service in the message of the picture. And this same intensity of suggestion speaks with equal clearness in the draughtsman-ship. How much we learn of the creator's intention from the arched line of Hope's bent figure, from the wide shadowing wings of Love, or from the draped folds of Death's full shroud, or again from the massive size of the resting Dray Horses. What force of meaning is conveyed by the grand and passionate lines in "Eve Repentant," that tragic and supreme presentment of sorrow expressed by the human back. The extended arms of the prophet Jonah accentuate the intention of the picture; his wide-stretched fingers compel us to realise the inner frenzy of his mind. And the same potent meaning speaks in the straight falling lines of the Rich Young Ruler's robe, in the powerful curve of his bowed head, and in the uncertain placing of his jewelled fingers. In this master-work every note of colour, every line conveys the utmost

## THE TATE GALLERY

realisation of the man's inward spirit. Again and again this deep significance meets us. From the wavering outline of Life's fair form we glean the thought suggested; from the rough, thick form of the Minotaur and of Mammon we know the very character of the figures. It is the same in every picture, the design unites with the colour in shadowing the meaning of the symbol.

It has seemed fitting to dwell upon the literary significance of these pictures of imaginative symbolism. If we consider the work purely from the technical standpoint, and without reference to the meaning portrayed, much of the painting must be said to fail. The pictures are great in spite of their technique and not because of it. Watts chose to be the teacher rather than the artist; often he voluntarily subordinated the technical quality of his work. To him the significance of line and colour was the primal essential. As we have seen, he used his paint to express the full force of his symbols.

It would be easy to select examples of uncertain outlines and strange postures. It must be granted that in many of the pictures the quality of the painting is disagreeable. In some of the canvases we are astonished by the use of strange colours, while glorious passages of pure tints are often placed in juxtaposition with opposing tones that do not blend. Yet, when we think of the work in its entirety, and consider the paint as part of the meaning, these technical anomalies seem to lose their significance. I have tried to show that these symbolic pictures fulfil the conditions of pictorial unity—that they have a special and distinctive harmony in line and colour, in addition to

## PICTURES IN

enforcing a beautiful idea. The pictures are not lyrics, they are epics in paint. They utter fittingly the burden of their message. Their very strangeness intensifies their meaning. As Browning says, "Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony might be prized." At Millbank Watts speaks to us as a prophet. In the early work of "Life's Illusions" alone does beauty of technique completely triumph over the ethical idea.

One portrait has been bequeathed to the Gallery, a likeness of Watts, painted by himself. It is a work of fine reticence and power, which reveals his strength in depicting character. The beauty and simplicity of a great personality are perfectly, and yet unconsciously, realised. In portraiture the genius of Watts is perhaps most clearly manifested. And if we wish to comprehend his power as an artist, we must go to Holland House, where many of his early studies are collected, and still more to the National Gallery of portraits to see his second gift to the nation.

It is not possible here to notice these works in detail. Their power is universally realised. Each portrait is an interpretation of character as well as a master achievement of art. The work is imaginative rather than realistic. In his portraits Watts always exalted the ideal. He still spoke his message to mankind. And for this reason, his presentments of men and women are more than perfect likenesses—they are revelations of individual minds. He caught the inward spirit of his sitters, and this he imprisoned upon the canvas. At all times it was the distinctive gift of Watts to see with new vision the truths that are eternal.

## THE TATE GALLERY

"The utmost for the highest" was the impelling motive of his life. His record was a chronicle of continued achievement. His entire life was dedicated to his art, and the outcome of his accomplishment was very great.

Within the limit of this brief chapter we are of necessity compelled to omit much of his work. Over his essays in sculpture we may not pause. Perhaps here he was most completely the artist and least the teacher. There is always something great in his manner of presenting form. His grand bust of Clytie, with its flowing, sumptuous lines of fully suggested beauty, stands in the midst of his pictures at Millbank. It is a supreme witness to his genius.

It was the desire of Watts to be a prophet, but Nature had made him an artist. In him the dual characters were united in rare and complete harmony. Nor need we wish that this had been otherwise. To say that art may not teach is in itself a didactic statement, which savours of the very error that is being combated. It is not possible to limit the scope of art. The painter who avoids literary intention, and produces a symphony of colour or a harmony of blending lines also teaches. One question only have we to ask with regard to any artist. Has he any message of beauty or truth to give to the world? And, after all, this is really asking what he can teach. If a painter has this individual message his art is great, indeed, his greatness is in exact proportion to the personality which illumines his work.





## CHAPTER X

CLASSIC ART: ALBERT MOORE (1841-1893)

ALFRED STEVENS (1817-1875)



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ALFRED STEVENS (1817-1875)



THE English artistic revival was the outgrowth of a multiplicity of ideas. We have seen that the keynote of pre-Raphaelism was personality, and many painters shared in the renaissance of art who followed distinctive pathways. Watts dreamed of an art that would again be the servant of Church and State. Alfred Stevens strove to carry forward in British art the unbroken tradition of the Italian renaissance, while Albert Moore worked to create, and really succeeded in revealing, an art that knew no service except the expression of beauty. He saw the gladness of pure form, the harmony of pearly colour, and the symphony of beautiful line. Each painter dedicated his life to the achievement of his ideal. Watts became an apostle for righteousness, using art as its revelation, while Stevens and Moore were disciples of that sense of beauty which is the eternal expression of art. They had no desire to make use of art to redeem the world, their wish was to redeem art itself. Their goal was sundered from that of the prophet-painter, but their sincerity and their devotion to

## PICTURES IN

their elected work was not less great. Like him they are solitary figures, parted from their contemporaries by the inherent inclinations of their natures, and by the singleness of their aim.

In Albert Moore the Greek spirit found a repository of exquisite tenderness. He sought to portray the type rather than the individual. In his painting there is something of the quietude, the aloofness, the pure intellectualised beauty of Grecian art.

This æsthetic perception came to him as his birthright. His father, his three brothers—Edwin, John Collingwood, and Henry—were artists, while his mother was related to William Hilton. In such a family specialisation in art became essential to success. A love of all that was beautiful was the child's ruling instinct. We hear of his kneeling before a tall white lily, and clasping his arms around it in baby rapture at its fairness. This is no solitary instance of the deep consciousness of beauty, which impelled Albert Moore's spirit even in his childhood. Long before he could read he drew every flower he could find, gaining an almost passionate joy from their colour and form. Upon one occasion he was praised for a drawing he had made of a Christmas rose. "Next time I will do it better," was his answer. A tenacity of will, rare indeed in such a nature, gave purpose to the boy's deep artistic perceptions. Before he was ten he was able to draw a creditable portrait, and at sixteen he sent his first pictures to the Academy, two water-colour sketches of "A Goldfinch" and "A Woodcock."

From these childish years we realise something of the

## THE TATE GALLERY

distinctiveness of Albert Moore's nature. He was the exponent of an idyllic art; at all times he strove to express an ideal that is permanent. He sought the beauty that is primal and perfect rather than that which is passionate and conscious. Very early in his career he recognised the fact that a picture must be decorative—that it must please the eye, be harmonious in line and colour before it can speak to the intellect. This was the painter's evangel, to the enforcement of which he devoted his genius. He painted beautiful dreams to prove the falsity of the ideal that a picture must necessarily tell a story.

There was a short period of uncertainty, between the years 1861 and 1865, before he had discovered his true bent. During this time a few subject pictures were painted. They were scenes drawn from the Old Testament history, dramatically rendered and handled with dexterity. This technical skill had been won by careful self-training. For a few months the young student had worked at the York school of design, and for a still shorter period he had drawn from the model, in the Academy Schools. But his art was too individual for such a training, and he found that he could work better alone. The chief event that influenced these prentice years was his friendship with Eden Nesfield the architect. For some time he worked with him, designing wall-papers and ceilings, and also making many drawings for stained glass. This work seems to have riveted Moore's thoughts upon decorative composition. He realised how much painting had lost since it had ceased to be regarded simply as one part in a scheme of decoration. To him it seemed that



## PICTURES IN

art was in a state of chaos, destroyed by the modern illustrative picture. Formerly painting had shared something of the symmetrical proportions of architecture, for, of necessity, it had to harmonise with the lines of the wall space it ornamented; now this sense of pictorial design was lost, and beauty and harmony had become of less moment than literary intention.

These ideas were strengthened by a short stay in Rome during the year of 1862. "Elijah's Sacrifice," one subject picture, was painted; but in 1865 Moore finally laid aside all temptation to paint for popularity, and sent "The Marble Seat," his first decorative picture, as a challenge to the Academy. Next year two pictures were painted, "Pomegranates" and "Apricots," and each season new works of pure beauty were fashioned by his hand.

The very titles of his pictures speak their aim. "A Wardrobe," "A Musician," "Azaleas," "The Quartette," "Seagulls," "Shells," "The Dreamers," "Blossoms," "Reading Aloud," "Battledore and Shuttlecock;" these, among many others, are the idealised scenes that Moore created. They have a beauty that is of no special country and belongs to no time.

Perhaps his most perfect study of a single figure is the picture known as "Blossoms," which was painted in 1881, and exhibited in the same year at the Grosvenor Gallery. The calculation and reserve in this classic panel are supreme. Its absolute quietness is equal to its beauty, and we almost forget the supreme craftsmanship, so skilfully is it hidden.

The figure stands with her head thrown slightly back,



*By permission of the Autotype Company,  
74, New Oxford Street, London.*

**BLOSSOMS.**  
ALBERT MOORE.



## THE TATE GALLERY

against a slate grey wall, which is made beautiful by a mass of white cherry-bloom. The long folds of the tender rose-coloured robe perfectly clothe the figure. Her pale, gold hair is circled with a dark head-dress, which is tied with a lemon-toned ribbon. Curtains of a deeper rose tint are draped above, and this colour is repeated in the dull red rug which covers the black-grey of the ground. A white drapery is cast upon a low seat, and among its folds rest a yellow marguerite and a bright red shell. A spray of pale cherry-blossom lies upon the rug. These notes of colour render perfect the harmony of the colour-scheme. In his life of the painter Mr. Baldry writes of this picture as "a work which will in years to come be reckoned among the art classics of its century."

With absolute faithfulness Albert Moore maintained his ideal of beauty. It is probable that few of those who saw his dream creations year by year comprehended the labour that these harmonies entailed. Critics failed to realise the loftiness of his intention. They said his pictures were very pretty, and then spoke of their want of meaning. Moore was systematically misunderstood; he never gained the recognition he merited. But he had looked deep into the vision of all things beautiful, and he refused to change his artistic faith.

No painter ever worked harder than he did. He never swerved from regarding his pictures as decorations of pure line and colour. Every tint in his colour-schemes was delicately measured; the arrangement of every line was perfectly calculated. Go and study his pictures, then place your hand before one of those flashes of bright colour,



## PICTURES IN

given by a fan or shell or some such slight, and apparently unnecessary, object. Remove this and all the tints of faint yellow, peach-bloom pink, white and blue seem meaningless. It is those skilful touches that mark the final note in the painter's colour-symphonies. The same perfection of thought governs the arrangement of his draperies. Nothing is unstudied in those flowing folds, which so fully cover, and yet so exquisitely reveal, the limbs they clothe. Often months of work have been given to catch the true folds of a garment. This is no over-estimate, it is an absolute statement of fact. Moore robed his models in long ample folds of soft pale-tinted Chinese silk, he then made them move to and fro before him, while he made manifold sketches. He never touched a fold or tried to arrange the material with his hands, but waited always until he caught naturally the effect he desired. To realise the perfection of these draperies it is only necessary to compare them with fragments of Grecian sculpture. The folds reveal the same intimate harmony with the forms they cover; they convey the same expression of inevitable beauty. Think of the four sleeping figures in "The Dreamers," or of the single upright form in "Blossoms," or indeed of the women in any of his pictures—they might have stepped from the marbles of the Parthenon.

Moore was frankly an idealist. His pictures are not portraits of the women whom he painted, for at all times he sought the type in the individual. His aim was to preserve the classic ideal of beauty, not to reproduce modern forms.



## THE TATE GALLERY

He spared no exertion in his desire to realise his dreams. At the time he was painting his well-known pictures "Seagulls" and "Shells," he had a special machine made; a kind of revolving fan, which was kept constantly in motion. In this way a swift current of air was sent through his studio, causing the draperies of his models to blow to and fro with the exact effect of a strong sea-breeze. This is one instance among many, for every picture he completed represents the same patient and practical study.

One scene remains to be recorded. It is the last act in a life of rare fascination. In 1883 Albert Moore was attacked with blood-poisoning, and from this illness he never wholly recovered. Seven years later he learnt that an operation would shortly be necessary. With perfect calmness he continued to work during the eight months' respite that were granted to him. He had completed his picture "The Summer Night," when the time drew near; he then gave a farewell dinner to his friends, and told them he was going for a holiday. Several months were passed in a private hospital, then he returned to his work. But next year the disease reappeared, and a second, and then a third operation became necessary. His calmness and courage never wavered. He spoke of his illness as "a nuisance, but not insupportable," while it still left him free for nine months in the year during which he could paint. To the end his one desire was to finish his pictures. He had no fear of death. Speaking of the time when surgical aid would become impossible, he said, "Well, there will be an end of it." He died on September 25, 1893.

## THE TATE GALLERY

Lane. His model of the Wellington Memorial is at South Kensington, while the lions he designed for the railings of the British Museum are now guarded within the building.

The work of Alfred Stevens, though little recognised in his lifetime, is now seen to be supreme in those qualities which we are accustomed to associate most exclusively with the Italian name of Michelangelo. Mr. Hugh Stannus, in his biography of Stevens, says "He did what almost every artist since the days of Raphael has tried to do, and failed; he carried on the great tradition at no lower level."

To him was passed the torch of the Italian Renaissance. He caught the spirit of that great time and made it live anew. There is hardly an evidence of English feeling in his work; there is the same vigour and strength, the same noble majesty that animates the finest Renaissance painting and sculpture. Looking at the two sketches, "Judith," and "Alfred and his Mother," or at the designs for the "Isaiah," one cannot help thinking of Michelangelo. His work remains a living witness to a power of beauty which has existed unrecognised among us.

A recent testimony to the artist's greatness has been rendered by Professor Clausen, in his lectures to the students of the Royal Academy:—

"The only artist, as far as I know, who has been able to enter into and carry on the tradition of Michelangelo worthily is Alfred Stevens, whose Wellington Memorial and other works stand alone, as continuing the spirit of the Renaissance."

## CHAPTER XI

CLASSICAL ART: FREDERIC LORD LEIGHTON  
(1830-1896); SIR LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA  
(BORN 1836); SIR EDWARD J. POYNTER (BORN  
1836)



## CHAPTER XI

CLASSICAL ART: FREDERIC LORD LEIGHTON (1830-1896);  
SIR LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA (BORN 1836); SIR  
EDWARD J. POYNTER (BORN 1836)



IN the portrait-gallery of painters in the Uffizi at Florence is the portrait of Lord Leighton, painted by himself. He has chosen the Elgin marbles as the background for his work, and the fine head stands forth against the Grecian setting.

This portrait has been called a symbol. M. de la Sizeranne writes: "At the bottom of all the academic painting of England, as at the bottom of the portrait of the President, one is vaguely conscious of the procession of the Knights of Phidias." Like Albert Moore, Leighton was inspired by the decorative ideal. Yet the two painters are sundered by the difference of their temperaments; while one was imbued with the *ethos* of Greece, the other was an eclectic, carefully representing the Grecian form. Thus the pictures of the first painter are Greek in spirit, while those of the second, with all their perfection, only echo the outward beauty of Greek art. The contrast between the work of the two painters is one of recreating and reproducing; both



## PICTURES IN

of them have given us beauty, but only one has given us life.

A study of nature and an imitation of the great masters were the guiding principles of Leighton's art. This eclecticism was largely the outgrowth of a training remarkable for its diversity. In the choice of his multifold masters he followed the advice of Agostino Caracci's well-known sonnet. At the age of ten he was studying in Rome. He worked in the Berlin Academy, at Dresden, and later at Florence, Frankfort, Brussels, Paris, and then again at Rome. This catholicity of training was not confined to art alone, but was extended to every branch of culture. Latin and Greek were learnt from his father, who, being a physician, also carefully trained him in the study of anatomy. Before he was twelve Leighton could speak French, German, and Italian, and later he thoroughly mastered Spanish. His genius for painting unfolded early, and when still a boy he determined to devote his life to art.

Hiram Powers, the American sculptor, was consulted by the boy's father with regard to the wisdom of this decision. His answer, "Sir, you have no choice; your son is an artist already," recalls the verdict given by President Shee upon the genius of the youthful Millais.

Questioned more closely as to the boy's chance of success, the sculptor further predicted, "Your son may become as eminent as he pleases."

These details are necessary if we are to understand Leighton's art. His wide culture and his eclectic upbringing were potent in moulding his natural talent. The

## THE TATE GALLERY

effect of such a training upon such a mind was inevitable. Leighton's character made him peculiarly prone to the influence of academical classicism. Energy and precision were the corner-stones of his temperament. No detail of his life was trusted to chance; every hour of each day was pre-arranged, and every plan was fulfilled with rigid and unswerving toil. An anecdote, chronicled in the reminiscences of his friend Giovanni Costa, enables us perfectly to realise this strange mathematical vein, which intermingled with a nature of restless and artistic energy.

The two friends were travelling abroad, when the day drew near for Leighton to depart for England. He expressed deep sorrow at having to leave his companion, and bewailed the necessity of his return. But when pressed to stay, he answered that it was impossible. Before he had quitted London he had arranged for his model to meet him at a certain hour upon a certain day, and he must return to fulfil the appointment.

This incident is absolutely characteristic of the man. If genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains, then indeed, Lord Leighton must claim its fairest crown. His pictures were planned and carried out with this same exactitude. Costa tells us that he knew all the qualities a picture would have before he laid hands upon it. He had decided the colours in which he would complete the design; he knew the exact date at which the picture would be finished.

Leighton's scrupulously accurate and careful method of work is well known. The first deeply studied design of a picture was to him as a law of the Medes and Persians,

## PICTURES IN

and might not be changed. This was more than a principle, it was a veritable gospel. His strong bias for artistic mathematics, if we may use the phrase, caused him to fear the influence of any transitory mood—the passing inspiration of a moment that would cause him to swerve from his initial ideal. Like Plato, he held that passion was unsuitable to art. He believed in the permanence of art, and purposely excluded from his work every element of emotion that might tend to localise it or limit it to one special period. His only picture that can be called dramatic was an early study painted in Rome, entitled “The Plague in Florence.”

His pictures were built up stage by stage, with the same method of planning and arranging that is followed in the construction of a building. Each separate work was completed with an infinitude of labour. The numerous and beautiful sketches which were made for every picture are well known. In spite of his classical inclination and his foreign training, Leighton was English in his art. It was more necessary to him that he should have worked his best than that his pictures should be a success. Upon one occasion a brother painter suggested that he should refrain from finishing a certain picture, but should retain it as “a beautiful sketch.”

“No, I shall finish it; and probably, as you think, spoil it,” was Leighton’s answer.

Leighton obtained his high reputation at one stroke of the uncertain pendulum of fame. Before 1855 he was almost unknown. In that year his first great picture, “Cimabue’s Madonna carried in Procession through the

## THE TATE GALLERY

streets of Florence, "was hung in the Academy, and at once a keen interest stirred the art world. The critics united in a verdict of praise. It was the first year in which Mr. Ruskin issued his *Academy Notes*. A long comment was written upon the work, which the famous critic called "a very important and very beautiful picture"; while he ended with the statement, "It seems to me probable that Mr. Leighton has greatness in him."

The most interesting account of the picture is in a letter of Gabriel Rossetti to his friend William Allingham. He wrote:—

"There is a big picture of Cimabue by a new man living abroad, named Leighton—a huge thing which the Queen has bought, which every one talks of. The R.A.'s have been gasping for years for some one to back against Hunt and Millais, and here they have him; a fact which makes some people do the picture injustice in return. It was *very* uninteresting to me at first sight; but on looking more at it, I think there is great richness of arrangement, a quality which, when *really* existing—as it does in the best old masters, and perhaps hitherto in no living man, at any rate English—ranks among the great qualities. But I am not sure yet either of this or of the faculty for colour which I suspect exists very strongly, but is certainly at present under a thick veil of paint, owing, I fancy, to too much continental study. One undoubted excellence it has—facility, without much neatness or ultra-cleverness in the execution, which is greatly like that of Paul Veronese; and the colour may mature in future works to the same resemblance, I fancy. There is much



## PICTURES IN

feeling for beauty, too, in the women. As for purely intellectual qualities—expression, intention, &c.—there is little as yet of these, but I think that in art richness of arrangement is so nearly allied to these, that where it exists (in an earnest man) they will probably supervene. However, the choice of subject, though interesting in a certain way leaves one quite in the dark as to what faculty the man may have for representing incident or passionate emotion. But I believe, as far as this showing goes, that he possesses qualities which the mass of our artists aim at chiefly and only seem to possess. Whether he have those of which neither they nor he give sign, I cannot tell; but he is said only to be twenty-four years old. There is something very French in his work at present, which is the most disagreeable thing about it; but this I dare say would leave him if he came to England.”

I make no apology for quoting this well-known estimate in full, for it summarises all that is essential in Leighton's art. Already his style was moulded. This first important effort testifies how early he adopted that ideal of decorative art which he afterwards so steadfastly pursued. Intellectual qualities were purposely excluded from his work. No interest of incident or emotion was even permitted to interfere with the classic unity of his subject. His compositions were chosen for their scenic possibilities, and charm was gained by the pictorial harmony of the arrangement, or by the careful grouping of studied types of beautiful figures. Even the paint was used as a conventional garment to present the idea, rather than as a



## THE TATE GALLERY

living medium, in itself possessed of beauty. These are characteristics which never left the painter's work.

It would be superfluous to dwell in detail upon the history of the years that followed. Leighton's pictures are too well known for it to be necessary to particularise their merits, while little would be gained from the mere record of their titles.

In the beautiful "Psyche" of the Tate Gallery we see an epitome of his power. Many of his pictures are greater triumphs of technical achievement, notably the processional "Daphnephoria" and "The Captive Andromache," others, such as "The Summer Moon," "The Music Lesson," "Wedded," or "The Last Watch of Hero," are more popular, while "Cymon and Iphigenia," "Greek Girls playing at Ball," "The Garden of the Hesperides," as well as many others, are more sumptuously beautiful, but none of his works expresses more truly that polished grace which was Leighton's essential gift.

Psyche stands gazing down upon her bath, her figure is half-turned as she casts aside her flowing drapery of transparent white. Her lemon robe and girdle of pure blue rest upon the marble, one edge of the garment falls over the margin and dips into the bath. The limpid water reflects the draperies of white and yellow, and a large copper vase, standing upon the pavement. Behind the figure rises a colonnade of marble columns; their grey-white is relieved with gold coloured capitals and bases. Between the columns hangs a deep purple curtain, which falls in long rich folds, while above is the sky, a decorative arrangement of blue and cloud.

## PICTURES IN

The original design of *Psyche* was executed as a panel for the house of Lord Leighton, and the charm of the picture is gained from its decorative qualities. As an arrangement of harmonious lines it has exquisite beauty.

Very different is the second picture in the Gallery, "The Sea gave up its Dead." The composition is an effort to realise the imagery of the Book of the Revelations. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God . . . *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it*; and death and hell delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works." A conception of intense dramatic power is here treated as pure decoration. There is a haunting memory of Michelangelo in the figures and in the arrangement of the slab-like strata of the foreground. The classic restraint lends dignity to the theme, and the picture has a certain cold grace that is almost grand. And if the work fails to fully realise the scene, it is a great failure.

Loftiness of aim was the primal motive of Leighton's art. M. de la Sizeranne names his picture "The Spirit of the Summit," as a fit emblem of his work. "He might have called the picture 'The Spirit of my Painting,'" says the distinguished French critic. And his judgment is right. The echo of the painter's own words seems to come to us, in imagination, from that pure form seated amidst the starlit Alpine heights:—"Whatever of dignity, whatever of strength we have within us will dignify and make strong the labour of our hands; whatever littleness degrades our spirit will lessen and drag them down. Whatever noble



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THE BATH OF PSYCHE.  
LORD LEIGHTON, P.R.A.



## THE TATE GALLERY

fire is in our hearts will burn also in our work, whatever purity is ours will chasten and exalt it."

"Leighton has painted many noble pictures, but his life is more noble than them all." This was the testimony of Mr. G. F. Watts.

The painter's work has not yet been appraised by time. It is possible that in the years to come his pictures will be accounted among the great achievements of his century. But be this as it may, the greatness of the man will triumph even if the fame of the artist fails. This is no place to record his catholic sympathy or his unnumbered acts of generous help. Yet this at least we may say, no man has done more for British art than Lord Leighton, her greatest President. The painter once wrote a eulogy of Albrecht Dürer; well, indeed, may the words be applied to his own character and work:—"He was a man of a strong and upright nature, bent on pure and high ideals . . . he was a thinker, a theorist, and a writer . . . superbly inexhaustible as a designer; as a draughtsman he was powerful, but never without a certain mannerism of hand, wanting in spontaneous simplicity—never broadly serene. In his colour he was rich and vivid, not always unerring in his harmonies, not alluring in his execution—withal a giant."

We cannot sever from Lord Leighton the two painters who form with him the great triad of modern British classicists. I refer of course to Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema and Sir Edward Poynter. The art of to-day owes much to these painters of beautiful form. Their work has



## PICTURES IN

been "a protest against the dangers of a negligent and indifferent view of the high requirements of the artist." These are the words of Sir Edward Poynter. They epitomise the exalted ideal that has always animated the classical brotherhood.

With a certain amount of truth it may be said that the mantle of Lord Leighton has descended upon Sir Edward Poynter. We see the same scholarly composition, the same cold realisation of a scene. In intention their work is the same although in execution it is distinct.

"A Visit to Æsculapius," Sir E. Poynter's work in the Tate Gallery, is a fine example of his power in rendering classical form.

The picture illustrates the old legend:—

"In time long past, when in Diana's chase,  
A bramble bush prickt Venus in the foot,  
Old Æsculapius healpt her heavie case  
Before the hurte had taken any roote."

The picture is a classic fable, visibly and intentionally legendary. The figures of Venus and her attendants bear a certain memory of Michelangelo; all the design, and especially the arrangement of the beautiful leafy background are perfect. What we miss is the charm of tone and colour.

There is more personality in the classicism of Alma-Tadema, and within the limits of his distinctive capacity no painter has achieved greater triumphs. He is the archæologist of classical beauty, and his pictures may be called an encyclopedian treatise upon this subject. It is

## THE TATE GALLERY

this rare union of classicism with realism that marks the individuality of his art. It has been said that he has "put the antique world into slippers and dressing-gown." The real truth is that his pictures carry with them a strange memory of the Dutch genre paintings of his own land. We see the instinct for depicting intimate interiors perfectly translated into an era of Latin sumptuousness. It is not difficult to account for this remarkable intermingling of motives. The Dutch boy was a natural artist, and his first knowledge of painting was gained in the little Frisian village in which he was born. In his youth he was trained in the Antwerp Academy, under Baron Wappers, the great master of technique, while afterwards he worked in the studio of the historical painter, Baron Leys. Here, then, we find united the essentials of these pictures of classical genre—minute realism, perfect technical ability, and a strong sense of historical style. The nett result is a wonderful technical achievement, that gives us a sure, if somewhat cold, revelation of classical beauty.



## CHAPTER XII

POETIC ART: FREDERICK WALKER (1840-1875);  
GEORGE HEMING MASON (1818-1873); JOHN  
WILLIAM NORTH (BORN 1842)





## CHAPTER XII

POETIC ART: FREDERICK WALKER (1840-1875); GEORGE  
HEMING MASON (1818-1873); JOHN WILLIAM NORTH  
(BORN 1842)



WALKER is the greatest artist of the century, and George Mason the biggest genius of the present day." This was the estimate of Sir John Millais, and perhaps he is right.

For the third time we have come to a triad of great painters, for J. W. North must be included in this group of poetic workers. The three painters were impelled by a united impulse, which gives them a special niche in the elysium of British art. They stand alone among their contemporaries. Their pictures have the rare quality of mystery; they give us an impression of a scene, captured, and then expressed. These painters are the transcendentalists of art. They show us a new relation between man and the phenomena of nature. Their pictures do not give us a photographic duplication, they clothe the real scene with the colour and glamour of an inspired imagination. In them we see the response of the individual soul to the beauty of nature.

For the work of each painter was the compelling out-

## PICTURES IN

growth of his own personality. Thus their pictures vary in their expression, although the same idyllic charm breathes in them all.

A curious hesitancy was the keynote to Frederick Walker's character. He saw nature in detail rather than as a whole. It has been said that if necessity had not compelled him he would never have finished a single picture. Never was he satisfied with his own attempts; he painted and repainted in strife of spirit, struggling to attain his ideal. Again and again he returned to work upon the same motives. Often he was inarticulate; for hours he would sit before his canvas in utter misery unable to paint. In his nature two conflicting purposes seem ever to have been at war. He had much of the Greek spirit; at all times he was intimately conscious of ideal beauty, but he was without the unity, the coldness, and the restraint of the classic attitude. He sought to realise idyllic beauty with the restlessness of a modern temperament.

This uncertainty of motive deeply influenced Walker's work. Continually in his pictures we discern this struggle for full realisation; almost all his compositions are built up of unrelated centres, wherein passages of perfect beauty alternate with sentiment and weakness. His pictures are a series of exquisite episodes; rarely do they attain a perfectly united impression. Perhaps for this reason Walker's art is strongly appealing; its very uncertainty enkindles a chord of peculiar sympathy that a more calm and perfectly balanced beauty could not awaken. Some-



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**THE VAGRANTS.**  
FREDERICK WALKER, A.R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

thing within us responds to the suggestiveness of his work.

One further point must be noted. A love for anecdotic romanticism often mingles with Walker's classic instinct for ideal form. It is impossible to deny that in many of his pictures the figures are sentimental; true, the sentiment is beautiful and imaginative, yet nevertheless these trivial conceptions weaken many of his compositions.

It may be this tendency arose from the necessity which compelled him for many years to illustrate stories for Thackeray, in the *Cornhill Magazine* and in *Once a Week*. In one way this work was good for the young artist, for the black and white work did much to counteract his constitutional hesitancy of expression.

It would appear that during these years the Greek side of Walker's temperament was in abeyance. In his early pictures, such as "Philip in Church," "The First Swallow," or the four designs of "The Seasons," the subject is directly rendered. These efforts are less poetic and less classical, but more homogeneous than his later works, where we nearly always find beauty intermingled with uncertainty.

Perhaps no picture illustrates these facts more entirely than "The Vagrants." The work was painted in 1868. It must be classified with "The Bathers," "The Old Gate," "The Plough," and "The Harbour of Refuge," the pictures that were the supreme accomplishment of the painter's last years.

The scene has many elements of beauty, but it misses true harmony of interest. Study the composition, and you



## PICTURES IN

will see there is no sense of inevitableness either in the landscape or in the grouping of the figures. The moorland scene, with its marshy distance and background of stunted brushwood, is painted with almost niggling carefulness. The tints are fine and the colour-scheme good, and yet we do not gain a clear impression of the autumnal landscape. We are conscious that the painter's poetic feeling has been deeper than his pictorial perception.

If we turn to the figures we find they correspond with the landscape, but they do not belong to one another. The strongly conceived form of the woman, who stands with her arms folded, passionate and beautiful, seems to have no part with the group around the fire. Her figure is almost perfect, but she is an added incident, of supreme beauty it is true, yet not an essential point of the pictorial scheme. It is the same with the remaining figures. The woman nestling her child, as she sits crouched upon the hillside, is simple and very beautiful, but the young boy who leans forward to kindle the new-made fire is singularly unconvincing. His attitude is forced and even trivial. There can be little doubt the picture would be finer were he omitted. A third interest is centred in the kind sister comforting her little brother. Here we have an instance of that pseudo-sentiment which accords so strangely with the classic beauty of these idealised peasants. The entire work is conceived in parts, and beauty is pursued rather than held as a captive by the painter's art.

In the far finer picture of "The Harbour of Refuge" these limitations are hardly manifest. The unity of the idea gives harmony to the unconnected grouping of the

## THE TATE GALLERY

figures, while a true pictorial effect is achieved by the careful distribution of light and by the cadence of glowing colour. The brush-work is delicate and detailed, but there is greater breadth than in the painting of "The Vagrants." This subject appealed intimately to Fred Walker, whose imagination was at all times poetic. His finest pictures treat of the primal emotions. Here we have youth and age sharply contrasted with the suggested idea of life and death. The landscape repeats the theme; the scythe of the mower sweeps down the daisied grass, the thorn-tree, with its full glory of blossom, tells of the gladness of birth, while the glory of the slowly fading sun, which bathes the sky in yellow glory, foretells the departing of day.

Like all Fred Walker's work it is possible to criticise the picture. It is not difficult to see that the grace of the young mower—the most classical of all his peasants—interferes with the reality of his action. He wears his classicism as a garment, it is not part of himself. Again the face of the girl is strangely incomplete, only her haloed crown of bright copper-coloured hair is perfect. It almost seems as if the artist had failed to realise his idea. The contrast between her figure and that of the bowed woman she leads down the steps is perhaps over accentuated. It may even be said that the wondrous colour-scheme of glowing reds is a little hot. And yet, the beauty of the picture remains. It may want perfectly balanced composition, but it is the expression of an artist who was also a poet, and it is filled with the suggestion of beauty.

In this brief survey I have only been able to indicate

## PICTURES IN

the main tendencies of Walker's art. I have said nothing in detail of his life, so short and yet so rich in its abundant harvest. In his case such a record is unnecessary. One thing alone we need to remember of poor Fred Walker, that a great gift of beautiful thought was his natural inheritance. His genius was so bounded by incompleteness, his conception of beauty so combined with weakness, that it is specially difficult to write of his work. Continually we meet him in a new mood; we need to study all his work. There are simple nature scenes, such as "The Street, Cookham," "A Rainy Day," or the water-colour painting of "The Housewife," a study of a girl shelling peas, where we see no struggle of conflicting motives. Again, there are humorous sketches like "The Three Fates," or scenes of pure impression such as "The Mushroom Gatherers." But these works are not, I think, Walker's truest expression of himself. His deepest thoughts did not readily find utterance, and the throes of painful birth are found in his greatest work. And this loss was not without its gain. "Fancies that broke through language and escaped" speak to us in these pictures with a special voice of infinite charm.

In strong contrast with Frederick Walker's beautiful and uncertain dreams are the perfectly realised idylls of George Heming Mason. The two painters are united by the poetic quality of their work, and by the fact that they both found this classic rhythm of line and colour in English landscape and in English peasants. But while the work of one breathes poetic suggestion, the pictures of the other express a complete poetic impression.





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THE HARBOUR OF REFUGE.  
FREDERICK WALKER, A.R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

Let me make this clear by means of an illustration. One day I was talking to a friend of the pictures at Millbank. My companion said, "There is one lovely picture; I forget its title, and I do not know who painted it, but it is a little landscape all wind and movement." There was no need to say anything more. I knew at once that the picture was Mason's "Wind on the Wold."

This power of conveying a supreme impression is the dominant note of Mason's genius. His landscapes, and still more his figures, have not the tragic pathos, the depth, the wistful tenderness, that charm us in many of Fred Walker's conceptions, but we feel a thrill of artistic response that answers to the unity of his appeal, and the work of few painters gives us the same unconditional pleasure.

Mason's life was one of romantic incident, wherein periods of deep misery alternated with success. He was trained for the medical profession, and we first hear of him gaining a medal for attending the cholera patients in the Birmingham Hospital. But Mason was an artist at heart, and his first picture, a romantic scene of "Gil Blas in the Cave of the Robber," was painted when he was only sixteen. In 1845 he went to Italy, and in Rome he determined to devote his life to painting. Five years of terrible struggle ensued. His father, a master-potter and a man of influential position in Staffordshire, now lost his money. Mason was left with only his painting to support him. For some years he literally starved. He lived in an empty room, his only covering a torn fragment of an old carpet, while for several weeks he had

## PICTURES IN

no food except *polenta* and salt. At one time he was three days without food ; he then crawled into the streets, where he found a cake cast aside by a child in the Pincio Gardens. Mason never quite lost heart, though broken health and nervous gloom were the heritage of these years of strife. He did not doubt that ultimately he would succeed in his work. "If I live, I will astonish you all," was his remark to his friend Mr. Aitchison.

It is not necessary to detail further the history of these Italian years. Before 1855 the struggle was over. In 1857 a first picture, "Ploughing in the Campagna," was sent to the Academy, and from this time Mason's position as an artist was assured.

The salt marshes of the Campagna held his imagination, and there he painted many scenes that foreshadowed his English idylls. Many of his pictures originated in literary motives ; often a verse of poetry would suggest a subject, while at other times his inspiration came from the effect of a colour harmony or from the curve of a beautiful line. Mason cared little for picturesque incidents. His pictures are idealised impressions of his own imagination rather than copies of the scenes he actually saw. He meditated continually upon his subjects, never painting until the whole scene was clearly visioned in his mind.

It must remain a question of uncertainty whence Mason derived the vivifying germ that first enkindled his imagination. His pictures painted before he came to Italy are stagey and dramatic rather than idyllic. In 1853 he gained the friendship of Leighton and Giovanni Costa, and for some time the three painters worked together. It



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**WIND ON THE WOLD.**  
G. H. MASON, A.R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

seems probable that Mason was influenced by the painting of the young Italian landscapist. That this is no fancy may be proved by Costa's "Landscape, with a view of the Carrara Mountains," also in the Tate Gallery. This picture does, indeed, seem to suggest the seed of Mason's work. A visit paid to Paris, in 1855, probably made Mason acquainted with the pictures of Jules Breton, and he can hardly fail to have been impressed with a genius so much in sympathy with his own. These forces may have helped to mould his expression, but his art was essentially an individual outgrowth. Italy spoke deeply to his spirit. He learnt the beauty of ideal form in these years spent at the fountain source of art.

In 1858 Mason returned to England, and settled with his wife at Wetley Abbey, the ruined manor-house of his forebears. He was intensely sensitive to every external influence, and once more a period of gloom shadowed his life. His artist's spirit cried for the southern warmth of Italy. He could see no beauty in the bleak, grey landscape that lay around him, while the Staffordshire labourer brought him no inspiration. He became mute with suffering and could not paint. The awakening came to him from Frederick Leighton. Here is the story as it is related by Signor Costa:—

"Mason lived almost in misery, hidden from the world, burdened with children, without hope or light. But the light came to him from Leighton, who went to him in his solitude, took him with him and showed him the exquisite beauties of the country, making, in a little sketch-book, drawings for schemes for future pictures. It was



## PICTURES IN

as if he reopened his eyes and inspired him with new life."

The painter now saw all things clearly; away from men, on the solitary moorlands of Staffordshire he found the fulness of his genius. For the first time he learnt the supreme loveliness of common life. And it was from the mastery of this lesson, when he had saturated himself with its spirit, that he was able to paint his finest pictures.

The first outgrowth of this newly awakened power was the exquisite "Wind on the Wold."

No phrasing of cold words can describe the idyllic poetry of this small picture. The swift blowing of the wind, the strong feeling of movement, the suggestion of young life in the girl and in the driven heifers, the ragged trees, stretching twisted limbs before the gale, the supreme sensitiveness, the cadence of quiet colour, the perfect harmony—we see these things, and the full beauty sinks into our spirit and leaves us dumb.

Never again did Mason paint Italian scenes. His pictures have been called "little coloured cameos of English life." Neither the landscape nor the figures tell any story; the pictures speak directly for themselves. The motives are always simple, in only two compositions, "The Harvest Moon," and "The Evening Hymn," is there even a suggestion of a subject. The beauty arises from the true pictorial quality of the work. "The Blackberry Gatherers," "Home from Milking," "The Young Anglers," "Unwilling Playmates," "Matlock, Evening," "Wetley Moor," "Girls Dancing," "The Cast Shoe," and many others, are all scenes of untranslatable charm. Perfect unity exists between the



THE CAST SHOE.  
G. H. MASON, A.R.A.

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## THE TATE GALLERY

idea and the realisation. The figures are always congruous with the landscape; the intermingled notes of colour have supreme concord. These painted idylls are exquisite glimpses of beauty imprisoned for our gaze.

Mark the perfect quietness of "The Cast Shoe." No picture that Mason has painted more abounds in poetic sentiment. There is no false note, no building up of effect. We see a wild marsh, and in the foreground a shallow pool, rush-fringed. The time is evening, the sun has sunk, and the sky is left with a radiance of full red. In the distance, gaunt against the sky, stands a long line of weather-driven trees. The white horse plods slowly over the rough track, while a few paces in front walks a lad, clad in a rustic blouse. His red neckerchief gleams bright with colour; in his hand he carries the cast shoe. The shadow of the white horse is reflected in the water, and the ducks that swim among the sedges repeat the note of light, making perfect the symphony of the colour-scheme.

The picture was painted in 1865, after Mason had left Staffordshire and gone to live in London. But the landscape is a picture of Wetley Common, and the moorland scene is supremely realised.

Mason died in 1872, in his fifty-fourth year.

"If I could only put all I know into a healthy body with young eyes, I would paint the finest pictures ever seen."

This remark Mason made a few months before he died. It seems probable he was mistaken. His work would have lost, and not gained, had his constitution

## PICTURES IN

been more robust. It would have missed the tender exquisiteness, which is its special charm.

It is left to say one word of the work of J. W. North, the third of this group of ideal Nature painters. His picture in the Tate Gallery, "The Winter Sun," is an exquisite example of his subtle and indefinite Nature-studies—scenes that are made beautiful with loving and minute rendering.

Professor von Herkomer has called J. W. North "the originator of the germ of the Walker school." This seems to be overstating the truth. Walker and North were much together, and they went to Algiers, at the time Walker's health first failed. Professor Herkomer considers that Walker's colour "took a deeper and richer glow" as the result of this companionship. It is difficult to estimate the justice of such a statement. That some connection existed between the work of the two painters can be seen from their pictures; indeed, the unity of their aims would naturally tend to increase the influence of friendship.

And here a thought arises of exceeding interest. North was the chosen companion of Richard Jefferies. In his notice of the prose-poet's last illness he writes: "I have been trying by a different art for thirty years to convey an idea to others of some such subjects (he has been speaking of the Nature writings of his friend), and I feel with shame that in the work of half a year I do not get so near the heart and truth of Nature as he in one paragraph."



## THE TATE GALLERY

May it not be that Richard Jefferies, the intimate lover of all the manifold beauties he found around him, was linked in one chain with these painters of poetic landscape? The cry of his Heart vibrates in their work; they also could have written:—

“I was sensitive to all things, to the earth under, and the star-hollow round about; to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me. Sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire visible universe filled me.”—RICHARD JEFFERIES:  
*The Story of My Heart.*



## CHAPTER XIII

A PAINTER OF PURE LANDSCAPE: CECIL  
GORDON LAWSON (1851-1882)



## CHAPTER XIII

A PAINTER OF PURE LANDSCAPE: CECIL  
GORDON LAWSON (1851-1882)



ONE idea dominates our thought as we gaze upon Cecil Lawson's "August Moon"—the picture is big in feeling. We are not sure of many facts about the work, but of this we are certain, the landscape has been grasped as a whole, it has the true unity of pictorial form.

The conception gives us something more than the outward semblance of the scene; here the real and the ideal intermingle. The foreground, the middle distance, and the background blend with perfect unison; our eye is carried into unmeasured distance, where a mystery of impression lingers. In the forefront of the scene the wonderfully realised firs gain grandeur from the space behind. A grace of composition marks the work. We gaze upon the clear cold colour of illumined night. The moonbeams gleam upon the water with phosphorescent silver, the rays catch with light the trunks of the trees. The landscape breathes the stillness of summer night. We see a stretch of marshy woods—

. . . "A glimmering land,  
With shadow streaks of rain,  
Lit with a low large moon."



## PICTURES IN

Yet, granting in full the power of the scene, we are conscious of some want, one last touch that would infuse with poetic inspiration the genius of the realisation.

Cecil Lawson composed his scenes grandly, his technical ability was great. In his rendering of trees he stands alone amongst English landscapists, while his pictures are always true in tone. But we are conscious he never completely realised the deepest inspiration of his own thought. This was Cecil Lawson's limitation, but it was also his power. We respond to the greatness of his aspiration, even while we feel that the goal was never completely gained. Nor must it be forgotten, in the appraisal of his work, that the young landscape painter died when he was thirty-three. Had his great natural power mellowed to maturer growth, it seems certain his expression would have gained that depth of fuller meaning, the one thing it lacks.

Cecil Lawson was born into an atmosphere of art. His father was a portrait-painter of great technical ability, while his mother was a woman of deep culture. The children of this union all shared the artistic spirit. One brother was an organist, while the second was an illustrator. A true artist at heart, Wilfred laboured at black and white that Cecil, eight years his junior, might be able to paint the landscapes he loved. Mr. Haseltine Owen has drawn a charming picture of their home in Chelsea, in *The Magazine of Art* for 1894. Cecil Lawson seems to have been gifted with something of the versatile fascination of Gabriel Rossetti. He was a rare mimic, and possessed a fund of abounding humour. Often he would

## THE TATE GALLERY

recite passages of prose or verse, while at all times he delighted to speak of the scenes that were visioned in his imagination.

The technicalities of his art were learnt from his father, who trained both his artist sons with extreme care and considerable severity. Cecil Lawson owed much to the sympathy of his brother Wilfred. He worked with him for some time at black and white illustrations for the magazines. But while still a boy he decided to devote his power to landscape work, and throughout this period of drudgery, he never ceased to dream and talk of the subjects for his Nature pictures.

His love of Nature was different from the intimate and idyllic passion that inspired Fred Walker, Mason, or J. W. North. Nature scenes were rather opportunities for the manifestation of his genius than dreams of idyllic beauty, summoning him and impelling him to find expression.

Cecil Lawson was more of a painter than a poet. He saw Nature with the large vision of the pure artist, not with the inner passion of the artist who is also an idealist. His greatest power arose from his knowledge of the intensity of light, and his understanding of its effect upon colour. It is this power which gives a sublimity to his trees. Almost alone among English painters he realises each tree as an object surrounded by light. His pictures are always true in tone, while his subtle gradations of colour have the reality of life.

It was in the colour of a landscape that Cecil Lawson found his inspiration. "The August Moon" was sug-

## PICTURES IN

gested by an evening scene at Blackdown, in Surrey, when he noticed a lovely and unusual effect caused by the moon's light playing upon water. Mr. Haseltine Owen was with the painter at the time. He thus describes the incident in the article I have already quoted:—"We drove together to see the moon rise over Blackdown. By the time we reached the place the moon was high in the heavens. I remember Lawson enlarging on the colour there was always in a landscape in such moonlight. He said that no great painter had yet fully grasped this truth, but that he intended to attempt to show it."

"The August Moon" was painted in 1880. Before this time many landscapes had been completed. A first large picture, a view of "Cheyne Walk, Chelsea," was exhibited at the Academy in 1870. The work was at once noticed for its power and its distinctive interpretation of Nature. Year by year fresh landscapes followed. Probably the finest are "A Pastoral," a scene taken from the sylvan vale of the Vyrnwy, Meifod, N. Wales; "The Minister's Garden," which was painted as a tribute to the memory of Oliver Goldsmith; "The Hop Gardens of England," and "The August Moon." This last work was chosen by the painter to represent him in British art, and upon his death, his widow gave the picture to the nation. His last landscapes were "The Wet Moon, Old Battersea," and "The Storm Cloud, West Lynn, North Devon." Both pictures were exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882, the year in which he died.

Cecil Lawson is one of the few British artists who have painted landscape solely for its own sake. Among his





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THE AUGUST MOON.  
CECIL G. LAWSON.





## THE TATE GALLERY

many Nature scenes only one, "The Voice of the Cuckoo," gains any interest from the introduction of figures. He was the genius of a fresh impulse in Nature painting, felt during the second half of last century, which had for its motive the desire to liberate a scene from the burden of narrative. Landscape art was to be freed from an intellectual motive, and the sole object of the work was to be the rendering of the scene.

Cecil Lawson was not the only artist who answered this new call of Nature. Mark Fisher, Alfred Parsons, Edwin Edwards, as well as others, devoted their power to pure landscape, their central purpose being to represent their scenes without the interest of super-added incidents.

Both Alfred Parsons and Edwin Edwards have pictures at Millbank. "When Nature painted all things gay," by the former artist, is a glad spring scene, beautiful with lush green grass and a wealth of blossom. The landscape by Edwin Edwards is a pseudo-Whistleresque impression of the Thames—if such a solecism may be used—taken from a wharf near Waterloo Bridge.

There is no bond between these artists and Cecil Lawson, except that, like him, they have painted landscape for landscape's sake. He remains alone among British landscapists, sundered from them by the greatness of his aim—"the bigness" of his view of Nature.



## CHAPTER XIV

THE PAINTERS OF THE SEA: HENRY MOORE  
(1831-1895); JOHN BRETT (1831-1902); JAMES  
CLARKE HOOK (BORN 1819); C. NAPIER HEMY  
(BORN 1841); COLIN HUNTER (BORN 1841)



## CHAPTER XIV

THE PAINTERS OF THE SEA: HENRY MOORE (1831-1895); JOHN BRETT (1831-1902); JAMES CLARKE HOOK (BORN 1819); C. NAPIER HEMY (BORN 1841) COLIN HUNTER (BORN 1841)



THE temperament of Henry Moore was akin to that of his younger brother Albert. A kindred artistic fire impelled them both; each possessed a subtle gift of seizing the spirit rather than the form of art, while each had a rare intensity of aim united with this innate perception. And the secret of their strength rested in this dual heritage. One brother found his Utopia in the ideal beauty of Greek art, while the lodestone that allured the other was the perpetual mystery of the sea.

The art of both Henry and Albert Moore was objective in its aim. The strength of their temperament enabled them to be completely occupied with the truthful rendering of their subjects. They were both recorders of what they felt to be the eternal principles in art, always they avoided any transitory or conventional ideals. Had their artistic instinct been less vital this might have resulted in coldness and want of life. But, as I have tried to make clear,



## PICTURES IN

in their case restraint was married to beauty; thus they give us an impersonal, and yet a living art, eternally true: one that belongs to no special race and to no special time.

If we remember these things, it is not difficult to realise why the seascapes of Henry Moore stand alone among marine paintings. Mr. Brett has given us the accurate and perfect form of the sea, with every wave carefully detailed and every effect of light mathematically noted; Colin Hunter and C. Napier Hemy both give us impressive incidents of marine life, always dramatically conceived and boldly rendered; Mr. J. C. Hook gives us the sea of picturesque tradition; but from Henry Moore we get the sea itself. His pictures are filled with the mystery and the terror of the deep. He sees the sea which calls and calls us English with the power of its unchanging change.

For a moment let us compare the seascapes of these painters. Mr. Colin Hunter's "Their Only Harvest" and Mr. Hemy's "Pilchards" are both scenes of vigorous movement. The figures are veritably working, and the individual action of each one is felt. Everywhere there is the animation of motion. But we think of the incident rather than of the sea. The seascape backgrounds are perfectly harmonious, every detail is faithfully painted;—the bright scales of the massed pilchards gleam in the early light of sunrise; the reflection of the brooding yellow sky upon the water in "Their Only Harvest" is finely rendered. Both pictures are literal transcripts of the scenes they represent. They are virile and true, fine

## THE TATE GALLERY

records of the artist's clear sight; what they miss is the insight of inspiration.

Mr. Hook has been called "The Kingsley of painting," and perhaps no other figure so clearly mirrors this veteran and popular painter. "Home with the Tide," "Young Dreams," and "The Seaweed Raker," his three marine paintings at Millbank, are all variations of the same subject. The pictures are vivid with local colour, and the canvases are crowded with incident. Picturesque figures stand upon the shore, or are gracefully posed upon the brown rocks and gay green cliffs. Everything is very bright and very pleasing; the sun is always shining, and the sea breeze is blowing. The pictures are crisp and fresh, and truly English, but they are untouched with the romance of the sea.

The work of John Brett is more intimately united with that of Henry Moore. Both painters depict the sea for its own sake, and not as a setting for marine incidents.

Brett had the pre-Raphaelite form without the true ideal of the pre-Raphaelite spirit. Of his first picture, "The Stone Breaker," Mr. Ruskin wrote: "In some points of precision his work goes beyond anything the pre-Raphaelites have done yet." In his seascapes the detailed care in handling and perfect finish are wonderful, indeed his effects are mathematical in their absolute accuracy. His mode of painting may be compared in many ways with that of John F. Lewis. The clearness of his atmosphere, the brilliancy of his light, his wide effects of sea and sky, are unexaggerated and exactly true.

In "Britannia's Realm" we gaze down upon a vast

## PICTURES IN

stretch of azure sea, flecked with innumerable waves and wavelets, shimmering into the distance, where fishing-boats and tiny vessels are dotted. The clear penetrating sunlight of summer fills the canvas.

The sureness of perfect mastery speaks in the work. And yet, in spite of the grace, the skill, and the minute carefulness, the picture misses something. It is without mystery—that lovely strangeness which transforms a fine painting into an inspiration of art.

And it is just this mysterious suggestion that Henry Moore gives us. He grasped the full meaning of the sea: he did not paint pictures so much as translate truths.

It would be superfluous to give in detail the history of Henry Moore's parentage. It will be remembered that his artist gift came from both his father and his mother, while three of his brothers were painters. It was from his father he received his early training; drawing was an instinct, and he began to sketch as soon as he could hold a pencil. His elder brother John Collingwood had already gained notice for his Roman landscapes, and for some time Henry worked with him. For a short period he attended York School of Art, but he gained little from the rigid training. In 1852 he came to London, and was admitted to the Academy schools. The following spring he had two Scotch landscapes, "Glen Clunie" and "Castle Town of Braemar," in the Academy Exhibition.

These were preparatory years, before he had found his true inspiration. He even seems to have wandered into the by-paths of pre-Raphaelism. Mr. Spielmann, in his





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CATSPAWS OFF THE LAND.  
HENRY MOORE, R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

article upon the painter in *The Magazine of Art* for 1895, mentions a cottage interior "painted absolutely in the pre-Raphaelite manner." In 1858 his first important seascapes, "A White Calm" and "Kittiwakes in their Nest," were painted, and from this time Henry Moore became the interpreter of the sea.

The energy and determination of the painter were supreme. He studied every aspect of wave form and wave colour, each subtle effect of light and atmosphere was carefully noted, there was no change of weather he did not know. Raging storms were defied, fatigue was forgotten, and once a severe illness of rheumatism was contracted through his devotion.

Certain French critics objected that his seas were too blue. "What do they know of the high seas," was the painter's answer, "they, who judge the sea only by their own flat sandy shallows."

Year by year he cruised continually on the water, in the Solent, in the Channel, off Cherbourg, Devon, or Cornwall, or on further journeys, to Norway and elsewhere. In this way he learnt to know the sea, and it is said that more than six hundred scenes of the sea were painted. His pictures give us the swelling of great waters; we see glimmering masses of moving colour, we realise the unspeakable beauties of the sea.

What words can picture these manifold scenes, for who can describe the sea? Henry Moore never tried to make pictures, and his seascapes are almost without incident. One of the few exceptions is "The Launch of the Life-Boat," now in the Walker Art Gallery of Liverpool,

## THE TATE GALLERY

perhaps the most popular, although certainly not the finest, of his works.

"A White Calm," "Clearness after Rain," "Calm before a Storm," "Winter and Rough Weather," "As when the Sun doth Light a Storm," "Shine and Shower," "A Breezy Day in Channel," "A Storm Brewing," such are the subjects he painted. The very titles seem to tell the story of the sea.

In the Diploma Gallery at Burlington House, Henry Moore is represented by "A Summer Breeze in the Channel," a pure seascape of infinite charm, full of light and colour.

"Catspaws off the Land," his picture in the Tate Gallery, was painted in 1885. The scene depicted is off the South coast, probably the Isle of Wight. White "catspaws" of wind ripple the surface of the water. A rocky hill-coast margins the sea, whose depths of luminous blue reflect the pale yellow of the clouds, and the tawny sails of two fishing smacks. The perfect quietness of the picture is its charm. Extreme reserve is its dominant character. We gaze upon it, and its silent truth steals into our spirit.

## CHAPTER XV

TWO PAINTERS OF ANIMALS: BRITON RIVIERE

(BORN 1840); H. W. B. DAVIS (BORN 1833)



## CHAPTER XV

### TWO PAINTERS OF ANIMALS: BRITON RIVIERE

(BORN 1840); H. W. B. DAVIS (BORN 1833)



WE have a sympathy with the lower animals which is peculiarly our own," opined Mr. Ruskin in his Oxford *Lectures on Art*. Certainly British painters have always shown a special interest in animal painting. The names of John Wyke, James Seymour, John Wootton, George Stubbs, Gainsborough, Morland, James Ward and Landseer at once suggest themselves as painters who have devoted their art, either partially or entirely, to delineating animal life. With Sir Edwin Landseer this branch of painting attained a popularity almost unprecedented. His humanised quadrupeds spoke with direct appeal to the heart of the people, his faults as an artist were unheeded, and he became the favourite painter of England.

This mantle of esteem has descended in a great measure upon Mr. Briton Riviere. His animals, it is true, have very little in common with those of his predecessor. He never falls into Landseer's error of making his brutes masquerade as human beings. "His animals give their minds to the business in hand. They never pose or think



## PICTURES IN

of themselves," is the estimate of his biographer Sir Walter Armstrong. The human appeal of his pictures is gained by the *mise en scène* of the work. With a few noteworthy exceptions, his animals are depicted in intimate relations with man; sometimes they are shown in a scene of sentiment, at others they are the actors in incidents of humorous intention, while perhaps most frequently we meet them in situations of marked dramatic action. In every scene the interest is well defined, while the appeal made to the imagination is simple and direct. The animals are one part of the stage apparatus, they always fulfil their parts fittingly; indeed, the great merit of the pictures is the unfailing comprehension of animal nature which they manifest.

Briton Riviere belongs to a family of artists. His father was a well-known teacher of drawing at Cheltenham, and afterwards at Oxford, his grandfather was a gold medallist of the Royal Academy schools, while his uncle, H. P. Riviere, was a water-colour painter of fair talent. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that Briton Riviere showed remarkable precocity in art. He was drawing animals at the Zoo when he was seven, and Sir Walter Armstrong mentions with praise a drawing of a wolf made at that time. His first pictures were exhibited at the British Institution when he was only eleven, while six years later he had three pictures at the Academy: "Sheep on the Cotswolds," "Tired Out," and "Monkey and Grapes."

A brief period of hesitance followed this brilliant prelude. For a time the young painter wavered in his alle-

## THE TATE GALLERY

giance to animal work. He was strongly attracted by the methods of the pre-Raphaelites, and began a series of poetic pictures which were all doomed as failures. While he was still in the throes of artistic uncertainty he gained the friendship of Orchardson and Pettie, and owing to their influence, he adopted, to a great extent, the technical method of the Scotch school. It will be remembered that the main tendency of the Scottish painters was to see their subjects in detail; roughly speaking, their method was to build up a picture stage by stage, both in its colour and in its design, instead of grasping the conception in its totality.

"The Sleeping Deerhound" of 1865 was the first picture painted under this new influence. From that time Briton Riviere has pursued an unhesitating course. Each year anecdotal pictures of animals have been painted, and a first unanimous triumph was gained in 1871, with "Circe and her Swine." The subjects treated have been manifold; scenes of dramatic or pathetic interest have been most frequent, but there have been many classical and scriptural pieces, and also humorous sketches, while the finest pictures have been painted to illustrate some poetic thought.

In the Tate Gallery we can study these varied expressions of the painter's mood. No other artist is as comprehensively represented, and only his classical scenes are absent from the collection.

"The Herd of Swine" is perhaps the best known of the pictures. The scene is a dramatic version of the Miracle of the Gadarene Swine, which at once explains

## PICTURES IN

itself. "And, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. And they that kept them fled.'

The chief merit of the picture is the painting of the swine. The terror of the stricken herd has been seized, and their wild rush of unthinking horror is given with strength and simplicity. Briton Riviere has studied the form of every animal he paints with continued observation, and in depicting them he rarely fails.

Perhaps this comprehension of brute nature is seen most clearly in his studies of animal humour. The best instance is "An Anxious Moment," now at the Holloway College, where an inimitable flock of geese are pictured, waddling, with frightened and yet pretentious dignity, past a time-tattered hat. This same humour meets us in "The Blockade Runner" of the Tate Gallery. Here, a grey and white cat escapes with feline swiftness, along the coping of a high wall, from the clutches of a yelping terrier, who jumps in impotent clumsiness beneath. Three canine friends share his disappointment, and the disappearing cat is followed by a chorus of barks and the glances of four pairs of coveting eyes.

It is in such scenes of humour, where all interest is centred in the action of the animals, that we realise Briton Riviere's intimate knowledge of animal nature.

"Companions in Misfortune," and "Sympathy" are instances of the many studies of sentiment and anecdote that have gained the painter his wide popularity. In these pictures the animals participate in human affairs, and a feeling of sentiment is added to the interest of their brute





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THE MIRACLE OF THE GADARENE SWINE.  
BRITON RIVIERE, R.A.





## THE TATE GALLERY

nature. Both pictures are illustrations of dog sympathy, and it is worth noting that in each scene the brute action is made more important than the human.

One distinctive merit of Briton Riviere's work is the simplicity with which the scene is depicted. The composition is not overburdened with detail. He tells his stories with dramatic strength, and rarely does he leave his main *motif* to wander into side issues. This directness intensifies the interest of the work; it gives a unity of idea, which at once rivets attention upon the central action of the theme.

I have left one picture unnoticed. "Beyond Man's Footsteps" is the last of Riviere's works that has been added to the National Collection. It is so distinct from his other studies that it demands separate consideration. The scene shows us an arctic landscape of cold blue-white snow, illumined by the sinking sun, whose rays cause the ice-needles to scintillate with light. A white polar bear stands upon the ice-bound heights, and commands the vast solitude of the scene.

This poetic realisation of a difficult theme was not painted until 1894. In the power of its rendering, this work must be ranked with "The Persepolis" of 1878. There is a certain analogy between the two pictures. Both depict places where brute life reigns apart from man; the scenes convey the same sense of vastness and solitude. The lonely grandeur of "The Persepolis" illustrates the lines of the Eastern singer:—

"They say the lion and the lizard keep  
The halls where Jamished gloried and drank deep."

## PICTURES IN

In both pictures there is tone and harmony of colour, while the scenes are realised with quiet intensity. They are, I think, the greatest of Briton Riviere's work.

As an animal painter H. W. B. Davis has little in common with either Landseer or with Briton Riviere. He depicts his animals in their natural environment; we see them in their connection with nature and unrelated to man. This averts the temptation to clothe them with sentiment, which almost invariably ensues when animals are humanised or made the actors upon a human stage. An artistic advantage also arises from this simplicity of conception. Here the picture depends for its beauty upon the pictorial realisation of the scene, no anecdotal incidents are superadded, which can give the work a fictitious sentimental charm.

Mr. Davis is a lover of nature in her quiet moods. His father was a barrister, and a fact of more moment in his son's career, an enthusiastic fisherman. The boy went on many angling excursions, and in this way he learnt to observe quickly, the primal necessity for an animal painter. In 1852 Mr. Davis entered the Academy Schools. His initial intention was to be a sculptor, and for some years he worked at modelling, but his love of Nature drove him from the studio into the fields.

Mr. Davis is both an animal painter and a landscape painter, and in some of his pictures he makes the landscape his prime motive, the animals being merely incidents of the scene. "After Sunset," a rustic vista of meadows, stream and cattle, is an example. But these pastoral scenes



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RETURNING TO THE FOLD.  
H. W. B. DAVIS, R.A.



## THE TATE GALLERY

are not the painter's best work. His pictures gain their interest from his picturesque groups of cattle, from his horses, and from his dogs.

This power of depicting animal life will at once be seen in his pictures in the Tate Gallery; perhaps it is most visible in "Mother and Son," a charming study of a mare and foal. But in each picture the animals are well rendered.

"Returning to the Fold" was painted in 1880. It is a rural study of a shepherd and his flock. The sheep are passing along a hill-side, and as they go they graze upon the thick, coarse grass. It is the hour of sunset, and the colour-scheme is bright with local colour. The sheep are real sheep, true to Nature, and the same may be said of the dogs.

In the companion picture, "Approaching Night," we see a shepherd guarding his flock on a hill-side meadow, bordering upon a road. In the darkened landscape there is harmony of light and colour. The details are forgotten in the impression of the scene.





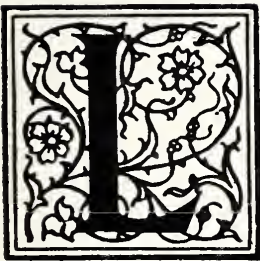
## CHAPTER XVI

### MODERN GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS



## CHAPTER XVI

### MODERN GENRE AND HISTORICAL PAINTERS



LOVE of anecdote has always been a central feature in British painting. A mere preliminary glance at the pictures on the walls of the Tate Gallery confirms this statement. Anecdotal pictures, infused with an historical, a pathetic, or a humorous interest form at least two-thirds of the National Collection. Such pictures continue in an unbroken succession from the paintings of Sir David Wilkie to the dainty romantic scenes of Mr. Marcus Stone.

A story need not, however, necessarily injure a picture. This is proved by Frank Bramley's "Hopeless Dawn," by La Thangue's "Man with the Scythe," and by many genre studies. In both these pictures we have the most self-evident story, but the stories are told through the medium of delightful colour and a technique which is full of charm. In these cases one feels that the stories have powerfully touched the painters' minds; and they have passed them on to us as something more than mere incidents. Thus, we are driven back to the knowledge that it is not the subject which matters but the sentiment

## PICTURES IN

which rests behind, and the manner in which the theme is rendered.

The danger of the anecdotal tendency is to exalt the story at the sacrifice of the paint. By this I mean that the artist is apt to think less about the beauty and quality of his colour, and the pictorial charm of his picture than of the direct appeal made to the sympathy of the gazer by the obvious meaning of his subject.

The early Victorian tradition of historical and domestic genre has been maintained by Frith, Egg, Thomas Faed, Horsley, Marcus Stone, Dendy Sadler, Joseph Clark, F. D. Millet, Yeames, and many others.

The pictures of these painters may be studied at Millbank. In addition to "The Derby Day" W. P. Frith gives a new and very charming rendering of "Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman." "The Silken Gown," and "Faults on both Sides," the pictures of Thomas Faed, are the true artistic offspring of Mulready, Webster, and William Collins; and the same, with a certain reservation, may be said of "The Pride of the Village," by J. C. Horsley, and of Joseph Clark's "Mother's Darling." Dendy Sadler and F. D. Millet re-echo the humour of Thomas Good in their pictures, "Thursday," "A Good Story," and "Between Two Fires." "Beatrice Knighting Esmond" and "The Scene from Le Diable Boiteux," the works of Augustus Egg, the "Amy Robsart" of W. F. Yeames, and Marcus Stone's "*Il y en a toujours un autre*," each find their prototype among the work of the early painters. They carry mingled memories of Wilkie, Leslie, M. E. Ward, and G. S. Newton.



## THE TATE GALLERY

It is not possible to note the personality which separates these painters, who may be said to bridge the gulf between the old and the new ideals of anecdotal painting.

The rise of the Scotch School marks a fresh stage in British genre painting. To some extent at any rate these painters rose above the tyranny of their subject; they still painted pictures of historical and domestic incident, but the story was chosen for its colour possibilities. To gain a rich resonance of tone was the distinctive purpose of these painters. They did not seek the natural tints of nature as they are revealed by light. Their method was frankly a convention; their aim was to carry colour into everything, and produce a glowing harmony by the skilful interweaving of their tints. The inspirer of the movement was Walter Scott Lauder, a teacher of remarkable strength, who became the head of the Trustees' Academy at Edinburgh in 1850. Lauder had studied in Italy, and his principles of colour were an effort to reproduce the warm glow of the Venetian masters.

It will be remembered that Orchardson and Pettie, as well as Peter Graham and MacWhirter, were among his pupils. Of the two friends Mr. Orchardson is the greater artist. His personality is more distinctive and his expression more complete, and for this reason his work is less representative of the modern anecdotal picture.

When we look at his paintings we realise again that the subject of a picture is secondary to its manner of realisation. Like Mr. George Moore, we may wish that the subjects of the pictures were different, but, after all,

## PICTURES IN

the main thing is the beauty of their colour, with its delicate gradations and masses of light tones. It is unfortunate we do not see Mr. Orchardson's finest work in the National Collection, "Napoleon on board the *Bellerophon*." "Her First Dance," "The First Cloud," and "Her Mother's Voice," all belong to the group of his popular later pictures. His genius is greatest in his portraits and in simple subjects with few figures, where all his power is centred in the luminous transparency of his colour. His diploma picture, at Burlington House, "On the North Foreland," is a study of rare charm of colour. Probably his two masterpieces—and I use this word fully realising its significance—are "Conditional Neutrality" and "Master Baby," the portraits of his son and of his wife. Of the former picture Sir Walter Armstrong writes, "I suspect that a century hence it will be looked upon as one of the treasures of the English School."

"Pettie played the trumpet to his companion's flageolet." This remark, made by Sir Walter Armstrong in his admirable monograph upon Orchardson, perfectly expresses the difference which severed the work of the two friends.

John Pettie was a strong painter, though not overburdened with emotion. His pictures are dramatic, almost noisy, in their intention, with bold and virile design, and with high local colour. The power of his work arises from his ability to suggest movement, and from the quality of his colour. He was one of the first painters to free the historic scene from the multiplicity of detail, thought necessary in traditional composition. A fine

## THE TATE GALLERY

instance of this simplicity of conception is his well-known "Ho! Ho! Old Noll!" where three figures stand in an empty space against a white wall.

Pettie's limitations were defined with almost equal strength. We miss the presence of any idea which suggests the inward thought that has inspired his subject. There is no poetic quality, all is vigour, action, and clever execution, without the slightest trace of introspection. A second limitation arose from his special method of colour, for in striving to get strong local colour into the minutiae of his scenes, he often failed to realise the power of light. Mr. Ruskin in his *Academy Notes* for 1875 makes this comment upon his work: "Mr. Pettie, a man of real feeling and dramatic power, is ruining himself by shallow notions of chiaroscuro."

Pettie's life does not offer many incidents of special interest. He was the son of an Edinburgh tradesman in good circumstances. As a boy, his facility in drawing was remarkable, and he made innumerable clever sketches of all his friends. His mother went to James Drummond to consult him with regard to her son's future. At first the Scottish painter advised trade. He then examined some of the lad's sketches. "Whatever you or I may say won't matter much; the boy will die an artist," was his verdict.

Pettie entered the Trustees' Academy, where he was strongly influenced by Robert Scott Lauder. At nineteen his first picture, "The Prison Pet," was exhibited at the Scottish Academy. Two years later "The Armourers" gained admittance to the Royal Academy, the first of a

## PICTURES IN

series of a hundred and thirty exhibits. In the following year the young Scotchman gained some notice for his picture, "What d'ye lack, Madam?" As the result of this success he came to London, where for some years he lived with Orchardson at 37 Fitzroy Square.

Pettie first secured the admiration of the public in 1864 with "The Drumhead Court-Martial." From this time his popularity never wavered. His pictures carried a memory of the romances of Sir Walter Scott; their vigour spoke directly to the heart of the public. Among his best known pictures are "Two Strings to her Bow," "The Traitor," "A State Secret," "The World went very Well," "The Chieftain's Candlesticks," and "Arrest for Witchcraft."

"The Vigil" was painted in 1884. The illustration renders it needless to write a description of the picture. It is not the painter's most typical work, and it is unfortunate that this is the only composition by which he is represented in the National Collection. Such a subject demands poetic thought, and this was the very quality Pettie lacked. A finer instance of his power may be seen in the Diploma Gallery at Burlington House. "The Jacobites" is a strong character study; it is a scene cut straight from a romance, wherein each figure plays his part effectively. In this work we realise the strength and quality of the painter's colour, and the subtlety of his brush-work.

Considerations of space make it impossible to continue step by step the record of the anecdotal painters, whose pictures may be studied at Millbank. The overpowering





## THE TATE GALLERY

predominance of these genre and historical compositions makes even selection difficult. All that we can do is to glance at a few of the most characteristic pictures.

Broadly speaking, the majority of the modern anecdotal paintings share the tendencies which characterise Pettie's work. They have more hard facts and less sentiment than the early Victorian genre, while, as a rule, they have also less humour.

One noteworthy exception is "The Doctor," by Luke Fildes. Here we have the apotheosis of the old artistic sentiment reclothed in modern guise. The manner of painting is the strong colour of the daylight school. We may look upon the picture as the archetype of the old ideal revived in a new form, wherein realism and sentiment are equally balanced.

Seymour Lucas, A. C. Gow, The Hon. John Collier, and P. H. Calderon may be roughly grouped together in what has been called "the matter-of-fact school." They relate their stories clearly, and with the exception of Mr. Calderon's "Renunciation," their conceptions are expressive of vigour rather than of sentiment. They all paint in the old tradition that colour is more important than light. All their art is expended in rendering the external aspects of their scenes; we never gain a gleam of that inner significance which may have inspired their work.

Two painters who claim a more distinctive notice are Professor Herkomer and Frank Holl. They both belong to the great portrait-painters of England. Holl's massive style of brush-work and vigorous system of lighting give his work extreme strength. His portraits are

## THE TATE GALLERY

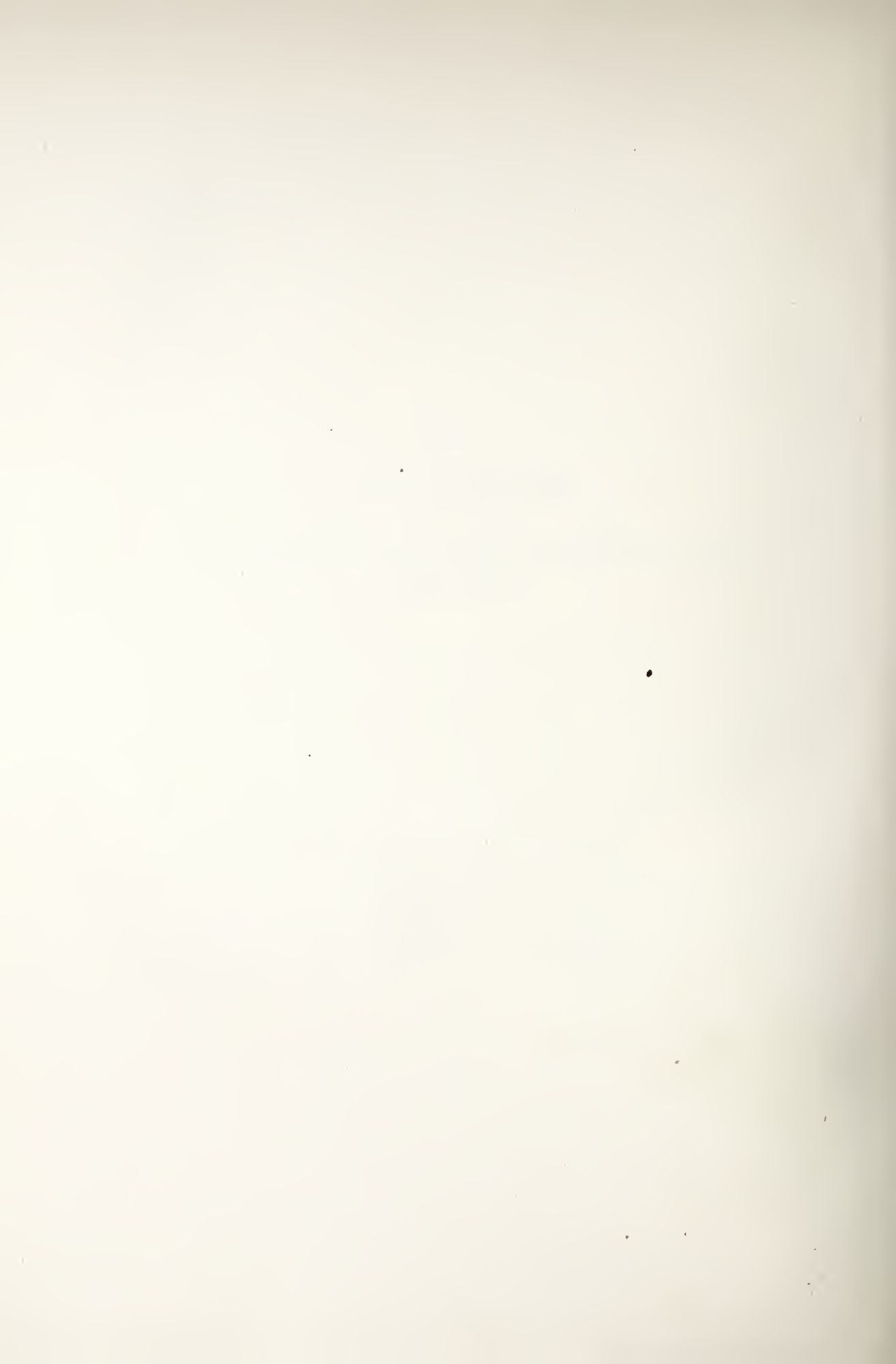
powerful revelations of his sitters. In the Tate Gallery we have two exquisite studies from his hand "Hush" and "Hushed." They are the most beautiful of story-pictures. Professor Herkomer's work has less personal inspiration. Yet he has always fine control over his medium; his colouring is delicate and harmonious, while his work is restrained and technically almost perfect. "The Charterhouse Chapel" is one of his well-known subject scenes. It was painted as an attempt to repeat the success of "The Chelsea Chapel," but it has not the power of the former work. "Found," his second picture in the National Collection, is a study of considerable interest. The conception has more imagination, although possibly the rendering is less technically strong than in "The Charterhouse Chapel."

A group of painters must here be mentioned who, for want of a more fitting name, may be termed the modern classicists. They tell their stories in classic dress cut in popular mode. The pictures of these pseudo-classical idealists are widely known. Frank Dicksee's "Harmony" and "The Two Crowns," Herbert Draper's "Lament for Icarus," "The Alleluia" of Gotch, and Arthur Hacker's "Annunciation" need no word of description.

Ideal art is supremely difficult, and especially is this true to-day. To carry forward "the great tradition" is given to very few, and the union of classicism and sentiment does not harmonise with ideal achievement.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MODERN SCHOOL OF *PLEIN AIR*  
PAINTERS



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MODERN SCHOOL OF *PLEIN AIR* PAINTERS



On the student of recent painting no characteristic more forcibly separates the old painters from the new than their way of treating colour, when it is transfused by sunlight. Broadly speaking, this desire for colour united with light may be traced as the inspiration controlling the work of every modern painter. The love of sunlight that was the primal inspiration of Turner and Constable has now become the heritage of the British school. It is the dominant principle by which we may guide our steps through the labyrinth of new achievement.

If you want to understand the full difference that this ideal of colour plus light has wrought in painting, contrast the modern landscapes with the work of the older painters. Look at such pictures as Mr. Arnesby Brown's "Morning" and Mr. Adrian Stokes' "Upland and Sky," with their strong play of light; or at the poetic English scene, "Sheep-washing in Sussex" by J. Aumonier; or again, at the vigorous modern work of Hamilton Macallum;



## PICTURES IN

or yet again at "Germinal," the exquisite water-colour of Lionel Smythe. Then go and look at the many landscapes painted with the old ideal of strong local colour. In the first group of pictures we see light falling upon the different surfaces and revealing colour, while in the second colour, as colour, is brought into everything, and each tint is painted separately with little regard to the effect which sunlight has in changing colour.

The modern landscapists have given a new harmony of light to rustic scenes. They have filled them with a beauty that few before them had been able to find. They show more subtlety, more fulness, more sunlight than we had dreamed of.

Perhaps no picture in the Gallery so clearly mirrors this result of clear light as "The Flower Girl," the work of J. J. Shannon. The picture is an impression of light. A girl sits beneath a plane tree, her basket of flowers by her side, while she nurses her child. The sunbeams scintillate through the leaves, and fall upon her face, her neck, and her cotton gown. Every colour is modulated by the play of the rays of light; where they rest there is pure light, but no colour. The tints are placed upon the canvas in broad splashes, with a square brush. If we walk a little distance from the picture every blotch of colour will blend into an impression of harmony. The effect is one of figures as seen in clear sunlight.

It is in this effort to realise the truth and beauty of both colour and light, that we find the essential power in modern painting. It is true that this search for full colour both in light and shadow often leads to extravagance, and

## THE TATE GALLERY

many recent paintings are witness of this fact. When a mass of varied tints are painted in a series of vivid spots, the result is often unrestful to the sight. Such an effect may be noted in "A Violin Concerto," the skilful study in water-colour by J. P. Gulich. In a work of this character the cleverness is perhaps more obvious than the beauty. But strife for individual truth must inevitably result at times in want of harmony. And after all colour is the main thing in painting. No picture can charm us when the colour impression is untrue or harsh, and if the colour is beautiful no work can wholly disappoint us.

Mr. Sargent's picture, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose," is a supreme example of the subtle power of this modern use of colour. The picture is too well known to need description, nor can its infinite charm be translated into words. Fantasy of design joins hands with reality of treatment, in a union of rare and yet beautiful originality. All the poetry of the picture is in its colour-scheme, while the effect is one of pure decorative harmony.

This increase of originality, although a proof of our growing artistic life, has also a certain danger. In this search for individual interpretation there is a tendency for our artistic expression to lose its national character. In many modern pictures we miss the intensity, the dignity, and the sincerity that are the heritage of British painting. Strangeness is a true factor in art, but there must be beauty also, and no work of art can be great unless it has the power of charm.

The work of some modern painters is marked by a

## PICTURES IN

strong French accent, and this note has clouded all that is peculiarly British in expression.

The pictures of Mr. Waterhouse are examples of this denationalised art. His compositions in the Tate Gallery are not his finest achievement. Many of his conceptions have great suggestive beauty, but their manner of execution is French and not English. Mr. J. M. Swan is perhaps the painter who has most entirely escaped the influence of these necessary results of pioneer endeavour. His expression of art unites the culture of the past with the original power and vigour of to-day. The exhaustive training he imposed upon himself in Paris and elsewhere has done nothing to lessen his personality. During those long years of discipline he gained unusual power over his materials. There is no hint of experimenting in his technique; nothing is left to chance, yet every detail is realised so that all effort is hidden. The cleverness is mantled in supreme mastery. Mr. Swan did not begin to exhibit until he was over thirty, and "The Prodigal Son" is one of his early works. In this picture the painter has compassed a supremely difficult task—he has given a new poetic reading to a theme worn threadbare. The suggestive thought behind the workmanship is perhaps its deepest charm. But the tender sensitiveness of its colour-scheme, the unity of its tone, the fine quality of the paint, and the decorative rendering of the design all unite to make it a work of rare beauty.

Among the disciples of light the painters of the Newlyn school take a prominent rank. The history of this little brotherhood of artists has been often told. Their

## THE TATE GALLERY

aim is to record truth, and to paint light rather than colour. In their delight of craftsmanship they have no fear of "the vice of subject"; often they paint anecdotal pictures, but the theme is chosen for its possibilities of light, whether it is the clear gleam of sunlight, the grey strong effect of a storm, or a room lighted by its own window, or by the glow from lamp or fire.

The pictures of Mr. Henry S. Tuke represent all that is best in the school. His work has the simplicity and reality which always belong to the Newlyn painters, and with these qualities he unites a poetic intention, sometimes absent from their work. He gives us his personal impression of a scene rather than an inventory of events.

Over the details of his life we need not linger. He studied in Italy and Paris, and for two years he lived at Newlyn. In 1885 he settled at Falmouth, a seaport he had loved from childhood. Four years later his picture, "All Hands to the Pump," claimed an admiration which has steadily increased.

This picture is included in the National Collection as well as "August Blue," which was painted in 1894. The two scenes are entirely different, but both reveal the same strong workmanship, both are marked by the strong personality of the painter's expression. The former picture is a scene of storm, rendered with dramatic, yet unexaggerated strength. "August Blue" is an idyllic summer sea, made beautiful with the shimmering light of the sun. No words can describe the wealth of sunlight that gleams from the canvas. Look at the white lithe limbs of the



## PICTURES IN

lads, and note the play of the sun's rays as they flood their young bodies in light. Mark the contrast of their flesh against the bright depths of blue. And this note of light is repeated in the white hulls of the vessels that sail in the blue-grey of the distance. Mr. R. M. A. Stevenson writes of the picture, "The canvas vibrates with blue, silver, gold and cream." It is a scene of joyous life, absolutely full of sunlight.

Mr. Stanhope Forbes and Mr. Frank Bramley have both given us pictures with strong effects of light. I have already spoken of the beauty of Mr. Bramley's "Hopeless Dawn." Much of this charm arises from the strength of the scheme of lighting, which gives harmony and subtle quality to the subdued and sympathetic colour.

Very different is "The Health of the Bride," the well-known work of Mr. Stanhope Forbes. In this picture the painter has given us the dexterity of the workman without the intention of the poet. The skilful arrangement of lighting avoids the conflicting reflections from the two windows; every detail is perfect, but the outward form of the scene alone is pictured. This "realism of externals" may arouse our interest; it cannot give us true artistic charm.

This picture is an illustration of one danger apparent in modern painting—the idea that skill of craftsmanship will compensate for want of poetic intention. It is not enough that a painter is able to observe externals truly, he must also see all he paints through the poetic eye of Beauty.

Among the painters represented at Millbank none attain





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**AUGUST BLUE.**  
HENRY S. TUKE, A.R.A.



## THE TATE GALLERY

more truly this union of reality with poetic beauty than Professor Clausen and Mr. La Thangue. In their work we see the overthrow of the old boundaries between romance and realism. Their pictures convey to us their personal impressions of truth, and by means of their poetic vision we obtain more perfect insight.

Mr. Clausen's "The Girl at the Gate" is a picture that it is impossible to describe. In the official catalogue of the Gallery we read: "A girl stands at the gate of a cottage garden, looking out with an anxious face; she wears a blue cotton dress and white apron."

But this bare summary conveys no idea of the rhythm of the colour, the subtlety of the light, and the charm of the design, which unite in giving a harmony of perfect beauty. Only when we gaze long upon the work do we realise its reserve and the power of its great calmness. Within its own limits the picture attains perfection.

Throughout the record which these pages give of the pictures comprised in our National Collection, we have seen that the general trend of modern art has been in the direction of original expression. Again and again in the work of special masters we have encountered this outgrowth of the pre-Raphaelite revival. This key-note of personality has now become the common heritage of the British school. Obsolete boundaries have been washed aside by a springtide of individualism. The English Renaissance has indeed made painting new. A modern

## PICTURES IN

craftsman searches for fresh forms of presenting old beliefs. Each painter strives for self expression, and at length insight is becoming more essential than sight.

Compare the work of the early Victorian painters with the modern pictures. Two words will illustrate the distinctive aims which have controlled the painting of these works—conformity was the watchword of the past, while freedom is the signal-cry of the new artistic creed. And such a comparison of the pictures at Millbank is in nowise complete. Much strong and original recent work has, as yet, found no recognition in our National Collection. Yet the examples are manifold, and this fact has made it extremely difficult to select the pictures that illustrate most fully the signal fruitage of modern painting.

The spirit of restless inquiry, born of recent thought, with its strong desire for reality, has resulted in a return to Nature. British painters have re-discovered the truth that natural objects are not coloured, but are lit by sunlight. This was no new knowledge. Mr. Clausen in his *Lectures on Painting* has reminded the Academy students that the beauty of shadow was taught by Leonardo da Vinci. In his treatise on painting the great Italian writes: "What is fine is not always beautiful or good. I address this to such painters as are so attached to the beauty of colours that they regret being obliged to give their almost imperceptible shadows, not considering the beautiful relief, which figures acquire by the proper gradation and strength of shadow."

The same truth was known to Turner, the great master of British landscape. His pictures reveal no sacrifice of

# THE TATE GALLERY

either light or colour. And it is this comprehension of the power of light that has made Velazquez the supreme impulse in modern art. Indeed, Spain is the land where the seed was sown of much of the artistic harvest we are reaping to-day.

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